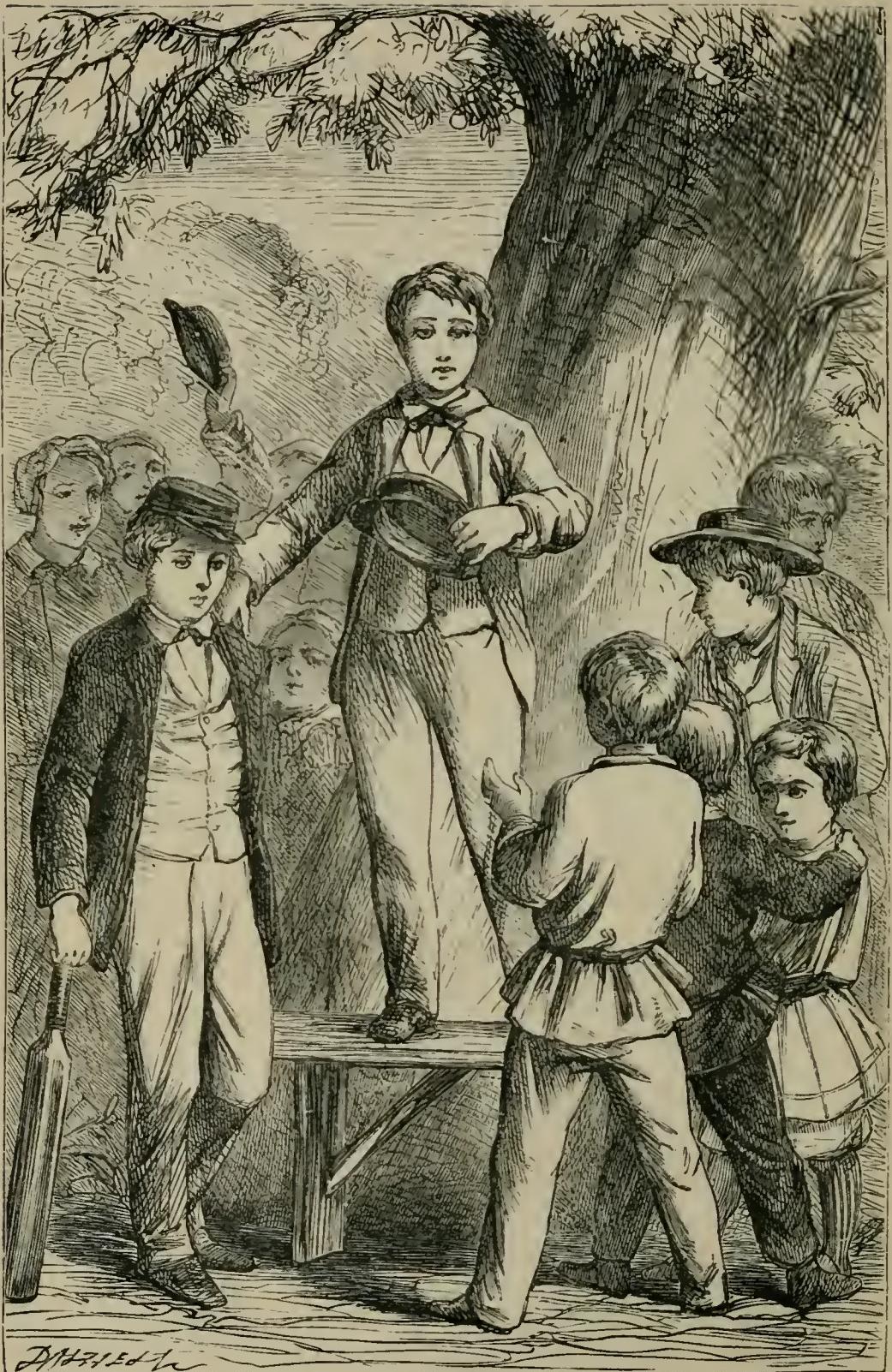


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Seymour proposes Mertoun as Captain.

THE
FIRST OF JUNE

OR

SCHOOLBOY RIVALRY

BY THE

REV. H. C. ADAMS, M.A.

VICAR OF DRY SANDFORD:

EDITOR OF "THE CHERRY STONES," AND AUTHOR OF
"SIVAN THE SLEEPER," ETC. ETC.

SEVENTEENTH EDITION

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TO

M. MARGARET

AND

GEORGE H. HOLDEN

This little Volume is Inscribed

BY

THEIR AFFECTIONATE UNCLE

B. C. A.



PREFACE.

CONTINUATIONS are generally more or less failures; almost always, when the original has been popular and successful. I shall be neither surprised nor disheartened if the present tale should form no exception to this rule. My motives for writing it are these:—

First, I regard “The Cherry-stones” as being, for a boys’ story, too short. It does not afford sufficient space for the development of the various characters it contains; and the interest excited by them is lost, almost as soon as it is awakened.

Again, it deals with one only of the two great temptations that beset the time of life, at which the chief actors in it are supposed to be. Previously to the awakening of the passions of approaching manhood, boys are tried for the most part by two moral dangers,—that arising from the inclination to conceal acts of disobedience by equivocation and falsehood; and that which springs from the bitter-

ness of school or playground rivalry. The former of these temptations is the theme of "The Cherry-stones;" the latter, of the present tale.

If any parts of either story should be considered by parents or teachers as too light and frivolous to find a place in works designed for so grave a purpose; I would beg them to remember the acknowledged difficulty there is in impressing boys of the age herein dealt with. It is to little purpose that we teach ever so wisely or profoundly, if the teaching is not listened to by those to whom it is addressed.

BROMLEY COLLEGE,
May, 1859

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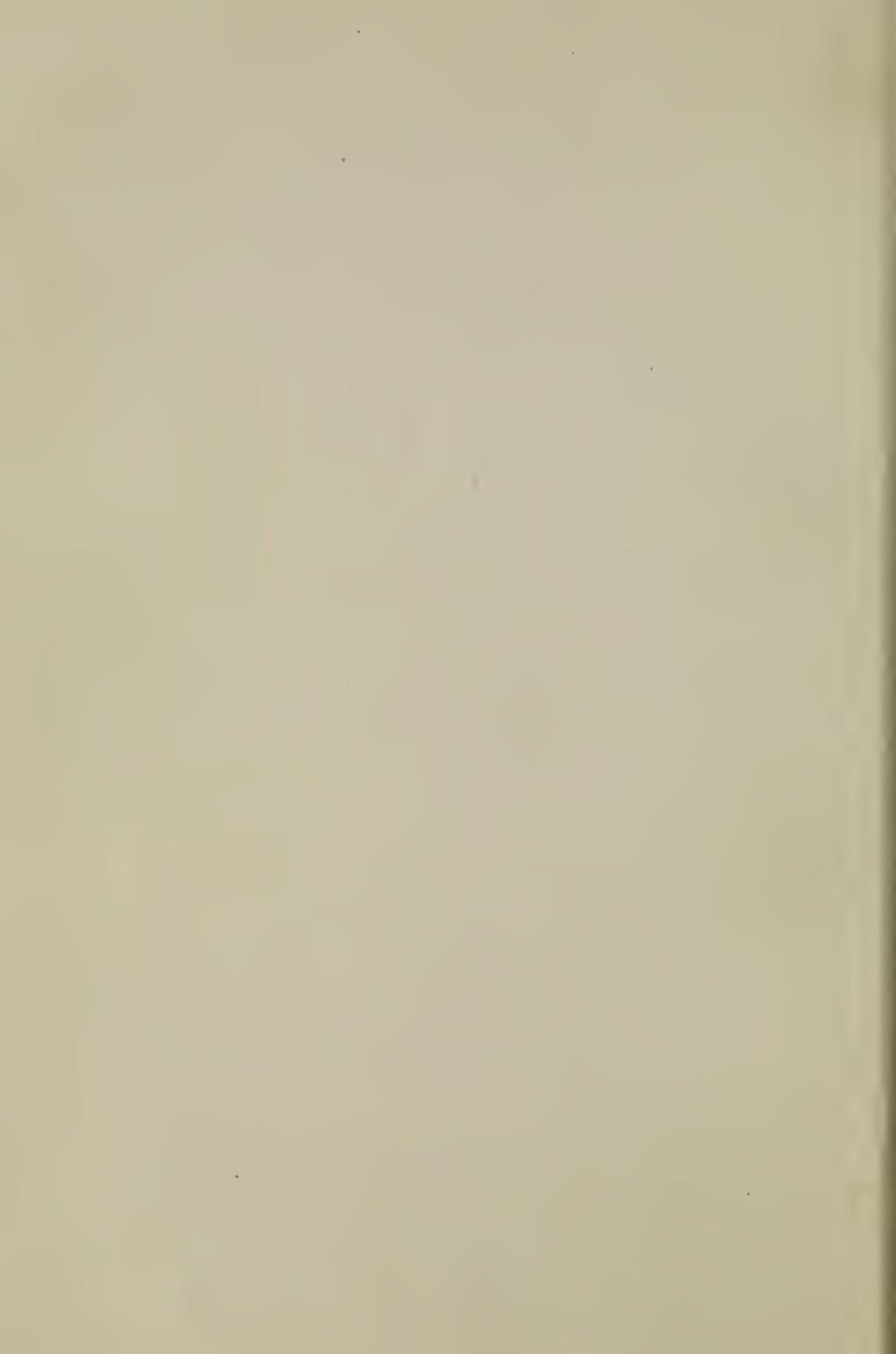
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CHAPTER I

THE BALLOT.

It was a fine afternoon about the middle of May. The boys of Dr. Young's school were collected at the further end of their playground; some gathered in small groups, playing at marbles or catchball; others seated among the roots of a large elm, discussing, as it would seem, some topic of general interest.

Those who are familiar with the story of "The Cherry-stones," will be already acquainted with the chief characters of the present tale; but, for the benefit of those who may not have that advantage, we will proceed to describe them. The fine tall lad, of fourteen or so, with the blue eyes and light hair, and pleasant, but thoughtful expression of countenance, is Charles Warbeck. He is talking to Frederick Seymour, the lad on his right, whose quick and merry glance at once bespeaks his character. Near him are George Markland, West

and Gyles ; all of them well-grown, gentlemanly boys, though with less, perhaps, of intelligence in their faces than those before mentioned. That boy, seated by himself, reading a book, in which he seems so much interested as to pay no heed to the noisy stir about him, is Edward Sharpe. His physiognomy shows plenty of talent and energy ; but the expression is not pleasing. It is too keen and searching ; wants openness and straightforward manliness. Harry Mertoun, the hero of the tale, is not present ; and his absence, and the cause thereof, appear to be the main subject of discussion.

It will be seen from the above description, that, notwithstanding the lapse of nearly a year, few changes had taken place in Charlton School. Mertoun, Warbeck, and Sharpe were still the head boys ; but the two former were to leave at the end of the half-year : Harry to enter at a leading public school, and Warbeck to occupy a stool in his father's counting-house. Nor was there much difference observable in the boys themselves. Both were some inches taller than when last introduced to the reader, and, it is to be hoped, the wiser for the intervening months of study ; but in other respects Charles was still the same quiet, thoughtful character, and Harry, to all outward appearance, quick, warm-hearted, and

generous as ever. Not so as regards Edward Sharpe. In many respects, this boy seemed to have undergone an entire transformation. When he first came to Charlton School, he had been more remarkable for the facility with which he got over his school-work, than for the talent or industry which he displayed in performing it. It had always appeared to be his aim to do just enough to satisfy Dr. Young, and to do it with as little trouble to himself as possible. But for the last year past he had taken to working with an energy and perseverance which seemed to combine the best qualities of Warbeck and Mertoun: and, as he was naturally shrewd and sagacious, and moreover possessed a retentive memory, he had become a most formidable rival to the two head boys. He had succeeded at the Christmas examination in carrying off the ciphering prize from all competitors, and had stood next to Mertoun himself in classics. So nearly had he approached Harry in this contest also, that it had cost our hero very severe exertions to maintain his superiority. In other important respects his conduct had been unexceptionable. He had been uniformly regular and orderly, and had received high praise from Dr. Young for good behaviour at the close of the winter half-year. But with the boys he was as unpopular as ever; whose sympathy, in

every contest between himself and Mertoun, was invariably with the latter.

Harry's own feelings towards Sharpe were but imperfectly known to himself. He could but ill bear to have his supremacy in Charlton School, which had hitherto never been really assailed, thus brought into question. The rivalry of Charles Warbeck was very different from that of his new antagonist. He was decidedly Charles's superior in talent ; and if the latter had ever really disputed the palm with him, it had only been because he was slack and negligent in his exertions, and a little additional energy soon regained his position for him. But Edward Sharpe he felt to be nearly, if not fully his equal in power, and decidedly his superior in steadiness of application ; and to recover any lost ground in a competition with him, was a very difficult matter. Besides Warbeck's gentle and friendly nature, which seemed to rejoice almost as much in his friend's success as in his own, disarmed all animosity : and Harry would hardly have grudged him the victory, if he had really obtained it. But his feeling was very different towards Edward Sharpe. Probably the secret dislike he entertained to him, which was even greater than that felt by the other boys, had alone prevented his defeat at the Christmas examination.

It had awakened every energy he possessed to the utmost; and the last month of the winter half-year had been marked by severer application than he had before displayed. All this, which, if undertaken from right motives, would have been so healthful for him, had the effect of heightening the secret dislike with which he regarded his rival. To so great a pitch had this risen, that Harry himself was startled at the delight which he felt when he found himself victorious; for it seemed to be occasioned less by his own victory than by his adversary's defeat. He had returned to Charlton School, after the holidays, half resolved to try and conciliate Edward Sharpe—at all events determined not to be his enemy. But as the half-year went on, and a fresh and still more severe contest arose between himself and Sharpe, his former feeling insensibly resumed its influence over him. How Sharpe felt towards him, it was difficult to say. He was a boy whose manner varied very little in his intercourse with others; and rarely gave indications of what passed within. Whatever, then, might be the secret feelings of either party, they outwardly showed no signs of enmity or aversion.

Such was the state of things at the commencement of our story. It was, as we have said, a fine afternoon in the month of May. All the school

were assembled at the end of their playground under a large tree, traditionally known among the boys by the title of "Morley's Elm." Respecting this title, it should be observed, there were various opinions current among the antiquarians of Charlton School. The more sober portion held that the "Morley" spoken of was an ancient proprietor of the school-ground; or, as others thought, a former pupil, who, many generations of boys back, was much given to studying his lessons under its branches. Some, who delighted to trace legends back to yet more hoar antiquity, affirmed that the Morley in question was the original planter of the tree; while others again, who, like Frederick Seymour, delighted in the marvellous and terrible, asserted that the aforesaid unfortunate Morley had been found one morning suspended from its branches, and lay buried under its roots: and Seymour even went so far as occasionally to terrify little Walter, by pointing out a slight swelling in the ground, which he gravely declared to be the spot where the bones of the ill-starred Morley were deposited. But, be that as it may, it does not concern our present story. The boys were not thinking about Morley, or his elm, or any thing connected with him; but waiting, apparently not too patiently, the arrival of some expected intelligence.

"Well, really!" exclaimed Markland at last, after several yawns, "this is pleasant work. What in the world can the Doctor have to tell Harry, that can keep him all this time?"

"I hope it is something agreeable," growled Seymour, reciprocating his companion's yawn; "it had need to be, for we are fast losing this fine afternoon: and why, I should like to know, need we wait here till he comes?" added he, as though a new idea had just occurred to him. "We might go out upon the green and begin our game. At all events, we might at least pitch the wickets: we could at any time leave off when Harry came."

"I think we had better not, Fred," observed Warbeck; "if you remember the Doctor particularly told us to wait here, and he must have had some reason for telling us. Besides, I feel pretty sure that it is some good news which we should be sorry to miss."

"Good news! Indeed, what makes you think that, Charles?" was eagerly asked by half a dozen of the boys at once.

"Only that he looked so good-humoured when he called Harry up," replied Warbeck. "Dr. Young never looks like that when any thing disagreeable has to be told. Don't you think so, Walter?" he said to the little boy who was

standing near him, listening attentively to what passed.

Walter nodded assent. "I think it must be that Harry has got a prize of some kind," said he, "and he knows we should all be glad to hear about it."

There was a general smile at the little boy's simplicity.

"That is your guess, is it, Walter?" said West. "Well, I wish Harry any good fortune that may happen to him, I am sure; but I don't think the Doctor would keep us here all this time in order to tell us that! Come now, who will give another guess? What do you say, George?"

"I guess," said Markland, "that Mrs. Young's brother, the lieutenant, has offered to take some of the boys down the river in his yacht."

"Or perhaps," said Styles, "Squire Ellison has invited some of us to see some fireworks in his garden, as he did two years ago."

"Or perhaps," said Warbeck, "he means to have the conjuror here, who performed two nights ago at Dr. Duncan's—a rival for you, Tommy!" he continued, turning to Tommy Brook, an urchin of twelve, commonly known in the school as "the Juggler," from certain feats of sleight-of-hand he was famous for performing; "I don't think that at all unlikely."

"Or perhaps," said Seymour, "the cholera has broken out in the village—or the Doctor is going to give up the school—or the Prince of Wales is coming here as a parlour boarder—or perhaps—perhaps we shall know all about it now, for here is Harry himself at last! Well, Harry," he pursued, as our hero made his appearance, with a letter in his hand, "what has made you so long? Here are we tired to death of waiting, and Charles himself half impatient."

"Some one was waiting to see the Doctor when he went out of school," replied Harry, "and stayed nearly half an hour: I was not with him more than a few minutes before I came out to you."

"Well, and now you have come," said Sharpe, rising, and closing his book, "what have you got to tell us?"

"First," said Harry, "I am to send Walter to Mrs. Young; I mention that for fear I should forget it. Next," he pursued, with some slyness, as he looked into the eager faces round him, "the Doctor has received a letter which has given him much pleasure, and which he thinks it would interest you to have read to you."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Seymour, starting up with an impatient gesture, "is that what we have been kept here all this fine afternoon to hear? Some

one of his old pupils has got a scholarship or a prize poem, I suppose, and ‘he hopes the example will stimulate us!’ I wish he would keep his letters for school-hours. Come, let us be off to the green at once, Harry; we have no more time to lose, if we mean to have a match this afternoon at all.”

The other boys seemed to be of the same mind.

“That’s right, Fred, let us begin at once,” said Markland; “our time is fast slipping away. Never mind the letter, Harry, now; we can hear it after supper, or before prayers, or at some time when we cannot play cricket. Come along, my lads,” and as he spoke he shouldered his bat, and moved towards the gate.

“Come along,” was the general cry; and the boys, with the exception of Warbeck and a few of the younger ones, began to move in the direction of the cricket ground.

“Gentlemen,” said Harry, “if you will take my advice, you will not be in so great a hurry; the letter may chance to interest you more than you expect.”

“Well, well,” rejoined Seymour, “if it must be, it must. Let us have this wonderful letter; only make haste. I trust it is not a very lengthy epistle. Now then,” he added, “my young friends, as Dr.

Young says, let me call your attention to a matter of some importance." So saying he seated himself in his old position; the boys also resumed their seats, and there was a general silence.

"Dr. Young desires me to inform you," began Mertoun, "that he has received the following letter, enclosed in one from Dr. Duncan; and if it is agreeable to you to accept the invitation it contains, he will make no objection to your doing so.

"Charlton Green, Wednesday, May 17, 184-.

"The pupils of Dr. Duncan's school present their compliments to those of Dr. Young's, and have permission to say, that they will be happy to play them a match at cricket any day in the course of the next month, if they can obtain Dr. Young's sanction for accepting the challenge. They will be glad to hear whether they are willing to play the match, and if so, what day will be most agreeable to them to fix for that purpose.

(Signed) "R. FERGUSSON,
Captain of Dr. Duncan's eleven."

As Mertoun concluded, a general burst of cheering made the walls of Charlton playground ring again.

"Hurrah," shouted Seymour, "won't we thrash the Duncanites, that's all! To think of their chal-

lenging us this summer, when we have the best players in the school, Mr. Powell says, that he has ever seen during the whole time that he has been usher here."

"Yes," said Styles; "they have not seen Harry bat this year, I expect, or they would not be in quite such a hurry to challenge us!"

"Or Warbeck bowl!" cried another voice.

"Or Styles keep wicket!" shouted a third.

"Or Seymour hit the ball twice running into the road, as he did yesterday!" exclaimed a fourth.

"Yes, they had certainly better not give Seymour full pitches, or Harry either!" said Styles.

"And I would not advise them to go out of their ground when Styles is keeping wicket!" rejoined Markland.

"Then, gentlemen," said Harry, who had vainly endeavoured to make himself heard through the hubbub, "I conclude you mean to accept the challenge?"

"To be sure—to be sure!" was the general cry.
"Why! you do not doubt that, Harry, do you?"

"No," rejoined Mertoun, "I do not. But we had better, I think, go to work in a business-like manner. Somebody must write an answer to the Duncanites, to begin with. Who is to do that?"

"You, to be sure," said Seymour.

“ And, in the next place, somebody must choose the eleven who are to play the match ;—who is to do that ? ”

“ You, again, if you like,” replied Seymour.

“ No, Fred, you are very kind, but I cannot take upon myself to do that ; at all events, not without some authority. Besides, we must have a regular captain. You see they have ; indeed all elevens have ; and I have no title to be captain more than any one else. What do you say, Charles,—you have played more in regular matches than any of us,—what is the usual practice in schools ? ”

Warbeck thus appealed to, replied that so far as he knew, there was no regular rule on the subject ; but the head-boy at most schools was *ex officio* captain, if he could play well enough ; that is, unless some one was especially appointed.

“ The head-boy,” exclaimed Markland, hastily, “ why that is Edward Sharpe, is it not ? I don’t think,—that is, I don’t believe,—I mean to say I am not sure—” and finding himself wholly unable to conclude the sentence to his satisfaction, he made an abrupt and awkward stop in the middle of it.

Mertoun’s brow was overcast. Markland was right. Sharpe had for the last day or two been at the head of the first class, and consequently would

upon Warbeck's plan be captain. Harry felt that though he did not care much,—albeit, he was not wholly indifferent, about being chosen captain himself,—he could ill bear the idea of being under Sharpe's command. He made however no observation in reply; while a general expression of dissatisfaction gathered on the faces of the assembled boys, and a few half-uttered exclamations intimated that such an arrangement would be by no means a popular one.

Sharpe had hitherto stood a little apart, listening attentively to what was going on, but taking no share in the proceedings. Now he stepped forward. Whatever might be his secret wishes, he was far too shrewd not to perceive that he would gain nothing by endeavouring to enforce his claim.

"I beg you will not introduce my name into the matter," he said; "I have no wish to be captain. You had better choose somebody yourselves, whom you would like."

"To be sure," said Seymour, too eager to perceive the lurking bitterness of Sharpe's words, "we will choose a captain ourselves. We will have a regular election, candidate, hustings, and all! Who shall be returning officer? You, I think, West; your solemn face will give the thing a proper colour. Now then, has any one a candidate to

propose? If any one, let him speak now, or for ever hold his peace!"

There was a general laugh; but no one seemed disposed to answer to Seymour's challenge. "Why do you not set us the example yourself, Fred?" remarked Markland.

"With all my heart," said Seymour gravely, mounting upon the top of a bench which stood close by. "Gentlemen electors of the borough of Charlton, I have the honour to introduce to your notice, Henry Mertoun, Esq., a gentleman with whose amiable qualities you are all well acquainted; and who, I have no hesitation in saying, is in all respects a fit and proper person to represent you in the cricket field." So saying he lifted his cap from his head, and making a profound bow to the assembled crowd, descended from his eminence.

His humour seemed catching. He had no sooner stepped down, than his place was occupied by Styles. "Gentlemen," he began, "in the absence of a more worthy person, it devolves upon the humble individual before you to propose to your notice a candidate for the office of captain: and I beg to say I know no one so fitting as our respected friend, Mr. Charles Warbeck, upon whose virtues I need not enlarge, being, as they are, well known to you all. I beg therefore to nominate that gentleman!"

There was another pause. "Has any one else a candidate to propose?" said Seymour. "No one? Then it only remains for our friend West, the returning officer, to take the show of hands and declare who is elected; always that is, unless a poll should be demanded!"

"No, no!" exclaimed Mertoun and Warbeck in the same breath; "we will not consent to be put up in opposition to one another." "Choose whom you like," added Harry, "but I will not stand against any one, and least of all against Charles."

"What is to be done, then?" cried Seymour; "are we to wait here all day until one of you overcomes his native modesty so far as to undertake the office? Has any one any thing better to suggest?"

"I will tell you what we can do," said Markland; "I have often heard my father talk of the manner in which they elect members at his club. When a candidate is propos'd, all the members present put their votes into a box—a ballot-box I think they call it—which is divided into two parts. Those who want him to be elected, put their vote into one division; and those who want him not to be elected, into the other: and if there are more than six votes in his favour for one against him, he is declared elected. What do you think of trying

that now? Suppose we put up Harry first, as he is above Charles in the school, and besides, was the first proposed. If he is chosen, well and good: if he is not, why then we can put up Charles Warbeck, you know."

The proposition was at once hailed as a bright idea, and unanimously adopted. An extempore ballot-box was soon formed, by placing a white hat and a black cap inside a large box, which stood at the further end of the playground. A marble was then handed to each of the boys by Markland and West, who were chosen scrutineers, with instructions to put their votes into the hat if they wished Mertoun to be made captain; and into the cap if they did not. To prevent all possibility of mistake, the additional precaution was taken of writing in pencil "for" and "against" in large letters, and placing them inside the two receptacles above referred to.

"There are just six-and-thirty boys in the school," observed Markland; "West and I of course do not vote, unless there should be a doubt. Nor, I suppose, do you, Harry; and your brother is with Mrs. Young, you know. That will leave thirty-two to vote. So that unless you have five enemies more in the school than I think you have, Harry, you stand a fair chance of being chosen

captain. Now Warbeck, you go first as the other candidate, and then Sharpe and the rest in school order."

Mertoun sate carelessly looking on, while his school-fellows advancing one by one, dropped their votes into the box, and returned to the tree. He had no very great desire to be appointed captain, though it would have greatly wounded his pride to be rejected. But he had no fear whatever of such a result. He knew that he was popular among his school-fellows; and besides, a boy must be very much disliked indeed to be black-balled under such circumstances. He considered the whole thing in fact as a mere form. Great, therefore, was his surprise and mortification, when Markland and West returning from their scrutiny with faces of blank amazement, announced that five votes had been found in the black cap, and consequently Harry Mertoun was not elected!

CHAPTER II.

THE FIVE VOTES.

A DEAD silence of several minutes followed this most unexpected announcement; and then the boys forgetting, in their excitement, that the ballot had been adopted for the express purpose of concealing how they had voted, began with one voice to disclaim any share in black-balling Harry.

“I am sure it was not I,”—“Nor I,”—“Nor I,”—“It is impossible,”—“It must be a mistake,” exclaimed a dozen voices together.

“I can’t understand it,” observed Tom Sawyer, a good-humoured but heavy-looking boy, belonging to the third class; who, together with his twin brother, Richard, had been additions to Dr. Young’s school within the last twelvemonth.

“Can’t you really, Top?” said Harry Baker, a lively lad of thirteen, “then it must be a poser, indeed! What do you think of it?” he continued,

turning to Richard Sawyer, who stood by, evidently sharing his brother's perplexity.

This pair of brothers, it should be mentioned, formed a favourite butt for the wit of the boys; and on their first arrival at Charlton, many had been the soubriquets bestowed upon them. The classical Mertoun had styled them Pandarus and Bitias, while the younger boys had contented themselves with such humbler appellatives as Gog and Magog, or Noodle and Doodle, and the like; until at last the question of their future title had been set at rest by the wag of the school, Frederick Seymour, who had dubbed them Top and Bottom Sawyer; the extreme appositeness of which, had procured its immediate and universal adoption. In fact the only subject of regret was, that Richard Sawyer's Christian name did not begin with B, so that the initials T and B might have precisely coincided with the *noms de guerre* bestowed upon them.

"I think," said Richard Sawyer, in reply to Baker's question, "that every boy ought to tell how he voted, and then we shall know who it was that did it."

"A most admirable suggestion!" said Seymour, "and one that would combine the advantages of open and secret voting. What do you say, gentle-

men? Suppose we act on our friend Bully Bottom's hint? Warbeck, you voted first, suppose you tell us how you disposed of your vote. You can speak next, you know, Sharpe," with a slight emphasis on the words. "What do you think of the proposal?"

"If you ask me what I think," said Sharpe, "I must say, I do not see the use of an election of this kind at all, if the result is not to be acted upon. It is making a farce of the whole thing."

"Really," said Seymour, "that is your opinion, is it? I must say you show a most profound judgment! I think we had better put you up next instead of Charles."

"Nonsense, Seymour," interposed Markland, "I wish you could be serious for two minutes! I am as much surprised as any one can be at the result: but the boys have a perfect right to vote as they like; and we have no business to try and find out how any one voted. I agree with Sharpe, that we are bound to abide by the decision; and I do not see how we can do any thing, but put up Charles Warbeck, as we agreed to do, if Harry should be rejected. What do you think yourself, Harry?"

"I am quite of your opinion," replied our hero, struggling hard to preserve his composure, "and I think the less time lost the better. Suppose you

give us the marbles again, and let us vote at once."

"Stay one moment," said Warbeck, as Markland was about to comply with this request; "had you not better count the votes through again, before you proceed to a fresh election?"

"Count them again!" exclaimed West, "why, where is the good of counting them at all? There were five votes in the black cap, I tell you, and only thirty-two voted: of course, therefore, there could be only twenty-seven in the hat. Nevertheless, if it is any satisfaction to you, I will count them. Hold the hat, George, while I take them out. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five,—why, I say, how's this?—twenty-six, twenty-seven,—why, I say, you fellows, what does this mean? Here are thirty-one marbles in the white hat! Stay, let me count them again. Yes, I am right, thirty-one! Hallo, I say, do you all hear this?" The boys came flocking up as he spoke. "Do you hear this? there are thirty-one votes in the hat, and five in the cap!"

"Why then Harry is not black-balled," said Tommy Brook, one of the younger boys, who, as has been already remarked, usually went by the name of "the Juggler," from an extraordinary trick of throwing up knives and catching them by

the handle, which he was fond of exhibiting ; “ then Harry is not black-balled ! Six times five are thirty, and he has thirty-one votes in his favour.”

“ That is not the point,” returned West. “ Do you not see that there are only thirty-two voters, and that thirty-six votes have been put in ? Some one must have put in more than one vote.”

There was a second and still more painful silence. The boys looked at one another with surprise, mingled with doubt and suspicion. At last the silence was broken by Warbeck.

“ It is plain,” said he, “ that this election must go for nothing. I propose that we put Harry up again, and vote openly. If any one has any objection to him, let him speak out. I am not fond, I confess, of secret voting at all, and certainly I think you will all agree we have had enough of it.”

A general cry of assent bore witness to the truth of this assertion.

“ I am very much obliged to you, I am sure,” said Harry, “ but I would rather not be put up again ; it is clear that some of the boys do not wish me to be captain, and I should be sorry to be chosen against their wishes.”

“ But you forget,” said Warbeck, “ that there were thirty-one votes in the white hat. The whole

thing is evidently a mistake, and ought to be set aside altogether, as though it had not happened."

The other boys joined their entreaties, and at last Mertoun suffered himself to be persuaded. Every hand appeared to be held up for him; and no opposition being offered, he was declared captain amidst universal cheering. It was then settled that he should, with Warbeck's assistance, draw up a list of the eleven, and write the answer to the challenge; further, that he should submit both documents to their approval at two o'clock the next day, before delivering them to Dr. Young.

The conclave then broke up; and as the afternoon was now too far advanced to begin a game of cricket, the boys chose sides for prisoners'-base; while Mertoun and Warbeck, seating themselves under Morley's elm, proceeded to the discharge of the important duties intrusted to them.

"There is no doubt about the first five or six," remarked the former, as he jotted down the names on the back of a letter, "Warbeck, Maryland, Seymour, Styles, West, and self. That is six."

"Yes," said Charles, "and Harry Baker. We must have him for long-stop, you know."

"Of course," said Harry, "I forgot him, and Tommy Webb also. He is very fair bat, and fields

capitally. He throws up better than any of us. Who comes next, Charles?"

"Well," said Charles, "what do you think of the two Sawyers? They do not get many runs, it is true; but they will block, block, block, for a whole afternoon together. We can put them in first, and they will tire the Duncanite bowlers completely out, before they come to deal with any other of the eleven."

"That will do famously," rejoined Mertoun. "Top and Bottom by all means; it will delight Seymour to see them at the wicket!"

"Well, that is pretty nearly all," observed Warbeck; "six and two are eight, and the two Sawyers make ten. We have only got ten then! Who is to be the eleventh, Harry?"

Mertoun made no reply. The truth is, he was debating within himself whether he should propose Sharpe or not as the eleventh player. There was no one among the remaining boys who was much superior to the rest, and one or two were certainly as good as Sharpe; whose play, though occasionally successful, was uncertain. Still he was head-boy of the school, and Harry could not help feeling had a fair claim to be chosen, unless there was any one decidedly better. But, as has been already remarked, he entertained a secret and growing dislike to

Sharpe; which was at the present moment unusually strong, for reasons which will presently be mentioned. A pause of a minute or two succeeded Warbeck's question. At last, Charles finding that his friend made no answer, spoke again.

"Perhaps," said he, "we had better look up the old scores again, and see who have got good innings in the matches this year," and as he spoke he turned over the pages. "Here is Johnson getting twenty runs, and Tommy Brook eighteen runs twice, and Sharpe sixteen runs and again nineteen runs. What do you say to any of these? They seem pretty nearly equal. Perhaps Sharpe ought to have the preference, being the eldest. What do you think?"

"I have no objection to make," replied Mertoun, coldly, "if you choose to have him."

"Choose!—nay, Harry, it is you who are captain, not I; I only made a suggestion."

"Very true! But it was a suggestion of that sort that one cannot well refuse to act upon."

"And why?" exclaimed Warbeck in some surprise. "I do not in the least see why you should have him if you don't consider him fit. Let us hear what you think about him."

"Well," returned Mertoun, drily; "if you ask me what I think about him, I shall be apt to give my opinion of him tolerably plainly. I think him

a mean, sneaking fellow ! That is what I think of him ! ”

“ I only meant, what you thought of him as a cricketer,” observed Warbeck, calmly; “ but, of course, if he is what you describe, it would be a great pity that he should make one of our party. What is your reason for thinking him sneaking ? ”

“ Oh, many reasons ! One thing that has occurred this very afternoon shows him to be a sneak.”

“ What was that, Harry ? ”

“ Why, you remember that only thirty-two fellows voted at that precious ballot, and thirty-six marbles were found to have been put in—five of them in the black cap. I have no doubt Sharpe put all those five in.”

“ Indeed ! ” said Charles, looking very grave; “ that would be sneaking most certainly : but really, Harry, you ought not to think such a thing as that, without some strong reason.”

“ Well, but listen, Charles, and you will find that I have a strong reason. I happened to notice, when Markland handed round the marbles, that he gave a very peculiar one, with a large white spot on it, to Sharpe. Well, I afterwards saw the five marbles which were taken out of the black cap; when West brought them up, and the white-spotted marble was one of them.”

"That proves that he put in one vote against you, certainly ; but not that he put in all five."

"Pooh ! nonsense ! I am sure no other boy black-balled me at all ! Why, you heard them all say so in so many words ; and they afterwards all held up their hands for me. No, no ; I am sure he did it ! I do not mind his voting against me ; that he had a right to do ; but he had no right to attempt to prevent my being captain by such a trick as that ; and I think," proceeded Harry, who had by this time talked himself into a high state of indignation, "that it does show him to be mean and sneaking ; and I think, moreover, that the eleven will be better without him than with him."

Warbeck pondered awhile. The affair was certainly a strange one. Some one, to all appearance at least, must have acted dishonourably ; and the circumstance of the white-spotted marble seemed in some degree to attach suspicion to Sharpe. Moreover he had observed, what apparently had escaped his friend's notice, that Sharpe did not hold up his hand when the open voting took place ; and that he was the only boy who did not do so. Still there was not the slightest proof against him ; and Charles was too just and right-minded to condemn any one upon mere vague suspicion. Another reflection, too, occurred to him—that it was

not wise, and scarcely fair of Harry, to have taken notice of any thing which might show him how any boy voted, seeing that the ballot was designed for the express purpose of secrecy ; and that he had no business to act upon, or reason from, information so obtained. Nor would Mertoun himself have denied this, or have thought of noticing any thing of the sort, if it had not been that his latent jealousy of Sharpe had stimulated his curiosity and blunted his nice sense of honour. But so it always is. The slightest breath of passion will dull the bright mirror of honour, and prevent our seeing clearly into its depths. After a moment or two of reflection, therefore, Charles again addressed Mertoun.

“ Why did you not charge Sharpe at the time with having put in more than one vote ? ”

“ Why, you know, there was no positive proof that he had done it : only strong reasons for suspecting him ; and one could not accuse him upon nothing but suspicion.”

“ Exactly so, I think you were right ; but I think that if there was not ground enough for accusing him, there cannot be ground enough for condemning him. Now, I think we should be condemning Sharpe, if we were to exclude him from the eleven on account of our suspicions.”

"Well, I see you are determined to have him," returned Mertoun, ungraciously ; "and, as I said before, if you choose to have him, I cannot well say any thing to the contrary."

"Not at all, Harry. I do not want to have him if he is not fit. I only say that your suspicions in this business ought not to go for any thing against him. If he is as good, or very nearly as good as any one else, he ought to be placed upon the list. If he is not, he has no claim at all."

Mertoun could not but acknowledge the justice of this remark. He felt in his own secret heart, that Sharpe was quite as good as either Tommy Brook or Johnson ; and that if he acted rightly, he would add his name to the list. Moreover, the simple truthfulness of Charles's character rarely failed to influence him for good. He had almost made up his mind to follow his advice ; but as he cast his eyes about him, to look for the pencil which he had dropped, his eye fell accidentally—accidentally we call it—on the well-remembered buttress, which stood within a few feet of where they were sitting. As he looked at it, the whole painful history of the cherry-tree, and with it the recollection of Sharpe's malevolence, and the sorrow and disgrace it had caused him, rushed into his mind. It turned the doubtful scale.

"I will tell you what we will do," said he, suddenly; "we will only settle ten of the players, and leave it to the boys to-morrow to determine whether Sharpe or Tommy Brook shall play. Nothing can be fairer than that, surely?"

Warbeck could say nothing against this arrangement; although he had a vague feeling that there was something in it which did not quite satisfy him. They proceeded, therefore, to the second part of their undertaking; viz. the inditing of the letter which was to be sent in answer to the challenge. This was soon completed, and Harry's name, as captain, appended to it. Warbeck then took both papers with him into the school-room; undertaking to make fair copies of them; while Mertoun, throwing himself at full length on one of the benches underneath the shade of the tree, passed the short time that remained before supper in meditating on the occurrences of the afternoon.

It might have been expected that these would have been of an agreeable nature. The cricket-match in prospect was certainly the thing which he would most have desired, if he had been allowed to choose; and the management of it had been intrusted to him, both by Dr. Young and by his school-fellows, in a manner which, notwithstanding the strange occurrence of the ballot, was on the

whole most flattering. Every thing seemed to promise that it would be a glorious affair for the school; and that he would be the hero of the day. Nevertheless, Harry was by no means delighted with the events of the afternoon. An ingredient was wanting to his satisfaction, without which it can never exist—self-approval. True, Edward Sharpe was not a better player than Tommy Brook; therefore, the former could not charge him with injustice. Nor, again, could any one say that it was unfair to leave the matter to be decided by the boys: and if an unfair decision should be come to, it would be their act, not his. But he could not disguise from himself that he was secretly prompted, more or less, by his private feeling towards his rival; and that if it had been any body but Sharpe, respecting whom the doubt had arisen, he would at once, considering his high position in the school, have decided in his favour. He had a vague idea that he was acting a paltry and unworthy part; but he tried hard to reason himself out of it. He argued that he was not bound to show Sharpe any particular favour: nay, he had deserved no favour at all; but rather the opposite at his hands: and surely he could not be blamed if he did not go out of his way to bestow especial consideration upon one who had evinced such a very

different spirit towards him. But all his ingenuity failed to satisfy his mind, or to persuade him that he was acting uprightly and honourably. He did not, indeed, suspect the whole extent of the evil he was fostering in his breast; and if any one had told him, that his resolution to leave it for the boys to settle whether Sharpe or Brook should play, was nothing but a cunningly-devised scheme to ensure the rejection of Sharpe, who was, as has been already remarked, very unpopular, without incurring the responsibility of doing it himself, he would probably have felt highly indignant. Nevertheless, it is much to be feared that such was the secret motive that prompted him to act as he had done, however little he might choose to acknowledge it to himself; and hence it was not without a pang of uneasiness and self-distrust that he repeated that night, before stepping into bed, the words of the petition, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us”

CHAPTER III.

SHARPE'S LETTER.

THE morning passed away much as usual, and at two o'clock, according to agreement, the boys again assembled under the great elm to hear the result of Warbeck's and Mertoun's deliberations. The letter was first read and unanimously approved ; and then Harry declared the names of the players selected. There was a little anxiety visible upon some faces as the last few names were read out ; but on the whole the list appeared to give general satisfaction. No sooner, however, had the captain announced that there being some difficulty in determining whether Edward Sharpe or Tommy Brook ought to be the eleventh player, it had been resolved to leave it to the school generally to decide the question—than Sharpe, who had sate quietly by, listening to what passed with more interest than he usually manifested in such matters, started up in-

dignantly from his seat—his usual self-possession appeared to have entirely deserted him.

"I am much obliged to you for this, Mertoun," he exclaimed, bitterly. "This is your doing, and I understand your motive! You are not satisfied with excluding me from the eleven, but are resolved to make my exclusion as marked and disagreeable to me as possible."

"I do not see that you have any right to say that, Edward," observed Warbeck; who, although he secretly felt that it would have been better to have included Sharpe's name among the players, yet could not hear so grave a charge brought against his friend without remonstrance. "If Harry had wished to exclude you from the eleven, he need not have put down your name at all."

"You always stand up for Mertoun," replied Sharpe, sullenly; "I know it is vain to hope for justice from you in any matter between him and me."

"Oh! Edward, I am sure that is not true," interposed little Walter, his face growing quite crimson at this attack upon his friend Warbeck, whom next to Harry, he regarded with the greatest affection and reverence. "Charles is always fair to every one. I don't think any body is fairer than Charles!"

"Well said, little one," observed Markland. "I don't see," he pursued, turning to Sharpe, "why

you have any right to say that Mertoun meant to keep you out of the eleven, more than Tommy Brook has. He might as well complain that he was proposed in order to be rejected."

" You know well enough that Brook is a favourite with the boys," was the reply. " No, no ; I am not to be deceived that way ! I know Mertoun meant that I should be excluded ; and what is more, I know why he wants to exclude me, and so does he too !"

" And pray what may be the reason that you know so well ?" retorted Mertoun, with equal acrimony ; " by all means let us hear it."

" It is not because I cannot play cricket as well as Brook," pursued Sharpe, with increasing anger, " but because I have committed the unpardonable offence of getting above Henry Mertoun in the school, and running him too hard for the first class prize !"

" Shame ! shame !" indignantly exclaimed a chorus of voices, as the boys heard this speech. " I am sure Harry is incapable of such meanness," cried Seymour, hotly. " And nobody but you would have thought of charging him with it," added Markland. Even Warbeck was roused so far from his usual calmness, as to exclaim, " Upon my word that is too bad, Edward."

" You are all against me, I know," retorted Sharpe, looking angrily round on the semicircle of



Sharpe claims his letter from Mertoun.

which he formed the centre ; " but I do not value your opinions a straw ! And as for the cricket-match, I will save you the trouble of settling whether I am to play or not, by saying at once, that I do not intend to have any thing to do with it, or with any other of your matches either ;" and turning sullenly on his heel, he walked away to the other end of the playground.

" A good riddance ! " exclaimed Seymour, as he watched his retiring figure ; " that is the meanest, most ill-conditioned animal I ever came across in my life. I declare I could not play the match in comfort, if he were one of our party. Just as if Harry would try to prevent his playing because he had taken his place in the class ! "

" Well ; but to proceed to business ! " said Markland : " I suppose it is now settled that Tommy is to play, is it not ? "

" To be sure,—of course," was the ready answer, in which all but Mertoun and Warbeck joined.

" Well, then there is no need to debate the matter further. You must remember to take the letter and list to the Doctor by half-past two o'clock, Harry ; as he generally goes out then, and the answer must be sent to the Duncanites to-day. And now I suppose the assembly may be dissolved I will tell you why I want to cut the matter short,"

he resumed, drawing Harry's arm within his own, and leading him to a retired corner of the playground. "I have something to tell you about Sharpe. I had intended to speak to you several days ago, but it went out of my head ; and it was only just now that what he said about getting before you, and running hard for the prize, put me in mind of it again. I am nearly sure that he gets unfair help in his school-work, and I really think you ought to be told of it."

"What do you mean by unfair help ?" asked our hero, a good deal surprised.

"I mean that his exercises—his verses, you know, and themes—are looked over and corrected by somebody, before they go in to the Doctor. Ah ! you may well look astonished," he added, observing his companion's face of amazement ; "but it is so, depend upon it, nevertheless."

Mertoun made no reply for some minutes. To do him justice, notwithstanding his prejudice against Sharpe, he was shocked at such an imputation upon him, as this amounted to. Moreover, his conscience was far from easy at the present moment, on the subject of the charges which Sharpe himself had recently brought against him. Coarse as his rival's language had been, and quite unsupported, as it seemed, by any facts ; it had, nevertheless, touched

him in a very tender point ; and though he was too proud to acknowledge it, even to himself, and far less to his companions, he felt certain compunctions visitings, which made him recoil more than usual from entertaining evil reports of Sharpe.

"Really, George," he said at last, borrowing a leaf out of Warbeck's book, "you should not say such a thing as that without very strong reason. Besides, I don't see how such a thing is possible. There is no one here, unless perhaps it is Mr. Powell, who would be able to look over his work and correct the mistakes ; and I am sure Mr. Powell would not do it, even if Edward were to ask him, which I can hardly think he would. You don't think he would, do you ?"

"Certainly not," replied Markland.

"Why then, who could ?" rejoined Harry.

"I don't think he gets help from any one in Charlton," was the reply.

"Why, what can you mean, George ? He gets help from no one in Charlton, and yet some one does help him ! I can't understand what you are talking of."

"I'll tell you, Harry," replied Markland, moving close to his companion, and speaking almost in a whisper. "I have noticed that Sharpe constantly receives long letters by the post, which he always

reads by himself—which, indeed, he never opens when any one is by.”

“ Well, but that is nothing. He is always a very reserved and mysterious sort of fellow in every thing.”

“ Wait a moment, Harry. Do you recollect that we went the other day to Cumbrook meadows, to bathe for the first time this year; that warm Wednesday afternoon, you know? Well, it happened that after bathing the boys were rather in a hurry to run in and see some new rabbits which Rob had got; and, in my hurry, I put on Sharpe’s jacket instead of my own. We did not find out the mistake for some time, for we are near of a size, and our jackets are the same colour; in fact, I only discovered the mistake by a letter, which I found in the pocket. It contained one of Sharpe’s exercises—a copy of verses on the battle of the Granicus. I recollect his getting a high mark for the verses from Dr. Young, a week or two ago. The verses were quite covered with alterations, and remarks all down the margin, in a different hand from Edward’s. It was not a boy’s handwriting at all, I am sure; but looked like some person’s who was quite grown up.”

“ That was strange, certainly,” said Mertoun.
“ What did you do with it?”

“ I gave it back to him, merely saying that it

was a letter of his which I had found. He made no answer, but looked very uncomfortable ; and ever since that I have observed, that the moment he receives one of his letters he slips it into his pocket, and generally glances at me to see whether I am watching him."

" Well, I own it does seem suspicious ; and by the bye, I remember now that Archie Lister, who knows Edward's family, did tell me that he passed some time with him at his mother's house last Christmas, and that there was an elder brother of Edward's who was a crack scholar at Cambridge, and who helped him with his lessons. Perhaps he may get help from him. But only think how mean and shabby, George, when we are running so hard for the prize, to try and get it by such means as that ! He is certainly not over-scrupulous,"—here the affair of the ballot again suggested itself to our hero's mind,—“and I don't suppose he particularly likes me,”—this was uttered with some hesitation, for he had a disagreeable consciousness that he was at least as much to blame as Sharpe in that respect, ---“but I hardly think he would go so far as this comes to.”

“ Well, you have a better opinion of him than I have, if you think he would hesitate at any thing. What makes him always so close and suspicious

himself? My father always says, that if any people are always suspecting others of being rogues, they are pretty sure to be rogues themselves! And only just remember, Harry, how meanly he acted last summer, just before the holidays, in that business about the—" Markland stopped short, and grew very red. He had forgotten his companion's share in the matter he referred to. Mertoun coloured also. He at once perceived and understood his friend's embarrassment; and though he took no notice of it in his reply, it was evident that the allusion had not been without its effect.

"What would you advise me to do, George, if what you suppose should prove to be the case?" he said. "You would take some notice of it, I suppose, would not you?"

"Yes, indeed! I would not let him get the prize in such a way as that, to be sure. Why surely, Harry, you would not think of such a thing yourself, would you?"

"Certainly not. But the question is, what to do. Let us consider the matter a bit. One might go straight to Sharpe, and require him to explain what has happened. But he very likely would refuse to give any explanation; and if he did give one, we could not rely on what he might tell us. Or one might report the matter to the head-

master ; but then that would be telling tales : and besides—”

“ I don’t see that,” interposed Markland ; “ you would not be trying to get Sharpe into a scrape, but simply to secure fair play for yourself, and, indeed, for all of us. I don’t call that telling tales. And if you did not like speaking to the Doctor, because you were personally concerned in the matter, there would not be that objection to my doing so — at least, not near’ly so much ; and I should be very willing to do it, if you liked it.”

“ Thank you, George, I am sure it is very kind of you, but — but — you see there is no positive proof ; and one would not like — ”

“ Ay, to be sure ! Dr. Young might not like us to charge any one with such a thing as this upon mere suspicion : I see that,” replied Markland, musingly. “ Perhaps after all we had better think no more about the matter. It is only suspicion, after all.”

Mertoun’s conscience could not but acquiesce in this remark. He had not many minutes before been blaming himself for having acted on a mere surmise, and for having, in consequence, as he was half afraid, done an injustice. Further, he had done it in spite of Charles Warbeck’s warning against acting on unsupported suspicion. Here

was a case very nearly the same, and a second opinion almost echoing Warbeck's words. But his animosity against his rival was daily gaining a stronger hold on him, and he could not prevail on himself to let the matter drop.

"We might obtain direct proof, perhaps," he resumed; "and then I should not mind telling Dr. Young myself."

"Of course not. But how could we get that?"

"Why, he might leave one of his themes about again: and then it might be shown to Dr. Young; and he would oblige him to say who had corrected it: for the handwriting would show that Sharpe had not corrected it himself."

Markland shook his head. "He is too wide awake for that," he said. "But I believe that is all we can do at present. If any of his letters do fall into my clutches again, I promise you I will let you know at once. By the bye, where did you say that his brother, who used to help him during the holidays, lived?"

"Archie said he belonged to St. John's College, Cambridge. Why do you ask?"

"Because I recollect that the postmark of the letter I saw was Cambridge. I am sure of it: for the name Sharpe was half torn off, so that I had to look very closely to make out to whom the letter

belonged, and I read ‘Cambridge’ quite distinctly on it — But we must not stay talking here. You must take that letter to Dr. Young at once, or he will certainly have gone out. He is seldom in his study after half-past two, and it is now nearly a quarter to three! So good bye, Harry. I will keep my eyes and ears open, and my mouth shut; and I advise you to do the same.” The boys parted; Markland rejoining his companions, and Mertoun proceeding to the head-master’s apartment.

Contrary to Markland’s expectation, Dr. Young was not only in his study, but disengaged; and he seemed in an unusually cheerful humour. “ Well, Harry,” he said, “ you have brought your list, have you? Dr. Duncan was here yesterday evening; and unless he is deceived by his partiality for his own boys, you stand a considerable chance of being defeated. He was a famous cricketer himself in his young days, and he says he never saw boys play so well as some of his present pupils. But never mind that,” said the Doctor, good-naturedly, “ I might tell him the same, perhaps, if I had a mind to boast, and there is no glory in defeating unworthy antagonists. Let us see who are to maintain the honour of Charlton on this occasion. Mertoun, Warbeck, Seymour, Markland, West, Styles—all the first class, I see. Well, perhaps, that is just

as well under the circumstances: for, I suppose, this match will take up a good deal of your time and attention during the next fortnight. Stay, though! Baker, Webb, T. Sawyer, R. Sawyer, and Brook. The last five are not in the first class. Then there are but six of the first class in the list! Who is left out?"

"Edward Sharpe," replied our hero.

"Edward Sharpe!" repeated the Doctor, with a keen glance at Harry: from whose face all his efforts to preserve a calm exterior, could not banish an expression of embarrassment. "Edward Sharpe! Can't he play? Why, surely, I recollect one afternoon, about three weeks ago, going out to see you play, and Sharpe was batting famously. Was it not so?"

Mertoun felt very uncomfortable. He remembered perfectly the occasion to which Dr. Young referred; though he had forgotten the circumstance of the Doctor's presence. It was the match in which Sharpe had scored nineteen notches, and which had been quoted by Warbeck, when he had suggested, in consequence, that the latter should be one of the eleven.

"He did play very well in the match you speak of, sir," faltered Harry, "but—but—"

"But what?" continued the Doctor, with an

other and a yet more searching glance; "do all the eleven selected play better?"

Mertoun winced under the Doctor's eye. "The boys thought Brook had better play," he said, evasively.

"The boys! were the eleven chosen by the whole school, then?"

"No, sir," said Harry, with increasing awkwardness of manner; "only Brook. I chose the rest at their request. I was appointed captain by them on purpose; and I read out my list to them afterwards."

"Do you mean, Harry," said his master, in a kinder tone, "that you put down Edward's name to play, and that the other boys objected to it, and wished Brook to play instead?"

"Not exactly, sir; I proposed both names for them to choose between."

"But why did you do that? did you think them equally good players? If so, I think the boys' decision was hardly a right one; for Sharpe, as the elder, and higher in the school, ought to have had the preference."

The boy was silent. He did not know how to extricate himself from the awkward dilemma in which he found himself. Every answer he made seemed to involve him in greater difficulty. Dr.

Young saw that there was something behind, and in some degree suspected the truth. But it was always his principle not to inquire too closely into the details of what passed in the playground ; though he never failed to note carefully, in his own mind, any thing which tended to the development of a boy's character.

" Well, Harry," he said, " I shall not ask more about it. But I see that you have forgotten to add to your list the name of the boy who is to keep the score. There must be twelve names on the list—eleven to play, and the scorer. Dr. Duncan called here yesterday, to say that it is his wish it should be settled immediately who is to play in the match. He says there are one or two boys in his school whom he could not allow to take part in it, as being idle and ill-behaved, and likely to lead others into mischief. Now, it has been arranged that the twenty-four boys concerned in the game are to dine in company in a marquee on the green, and to pass the evening together at my house, or Dr. Duncan's, afterwards. Dr. Duncan thinks it would not be right to bring the boys just mentioned into companionship with my pupils ; and I have promised that I will, in like manner, exclude from my list any who might be objectionable acquaintances for his boys. In order to this, the

names of the twelve boys who take part in the match are to be settled at once. Now, I conclude, from what you have told me, that Sharpe would be the next in order to play, if any vacancy should occur among the eleven. I shall, therefore, add his name as the twelfth. If all are able to play (for, I am glad to say, there are none on the list to whom I should feel bound to object), then Sharpe can score: if not, he can take the place of any one who may be disabled; and, in that case, I think, Harry," continued the Doctor, with a smile, "I must come and score for you myself."

Mertoun bowed in silent acquiescence to this arrangement. He did not venture to say that Sharpe had refused to have any thing to do with the match, in any capacity. He had had quite enough of the head-master's questions already, and had no mind to subject himself to a second cross-examination.

After a pause, Dr. Young resumed. "I own I could have wished that all the first-class boys should have played in this match. It would have been more fair to all parties, under the circumstances I am going to mention. My old friend and early pupil, Mr. Loughten, who was formerly one of the under-masters at Westonbury College—your future school, by the way, Harry—has written

to me to say that he wishes to give a prize to the first class for the best Latin poem on ‘Pompeii ;’ and desires that the compositions may be sent to him this day week. He cannot postpone the time of giving the prize, for reasons which I am not now at liberty to mention ; nor does he allow me to tell what the prize itself will be ; but I know it, and can assure you it will be well worth the winning ! I did not get his letter until this morning, or I should have proposed to Dr. Duncan yesterday, that nothing should be said about the cricket-match until the prize-poems had been sent in ; but Dr. Duncan has now made his arrangements, and I know that any alteration of the day—which we fixed for the first of June, yesterday fortnight—would seriously inconvenience him. And, after all, it is not a bad thing that you should all learn to apply your minds heartily to work in the midst of pleasurable excitement. The only thing that disturbs me is, as I have said, that Edward Sharpe is not one of the eleven, and, therefore, his head will not be turned half so much as, I suppose, the rest will be. But that cannot now be helped.”

Harry again bowed, and was retiring, when Dr. Young called him back.

“ You had better take these papers, Harry,” he said, “ and fasten them up in the school-room.

This contains the announcement of the prize, and of the conditions under which it will be awarded. You see all the poems are to be sent in with mottoes only affixed to them ; and a list of the mottoes, together with the names of the owners, in a sealed paper, is to be left with me. Mr. Loughten intends to examine the poems, and decide the prize himself. This other paper is the summary of the marks for this week's exercises. They are, I am glad to say, unusually high. Your verses are very good, and so are Sharpe's ; particularly his, which are more correct than yours. You have the highest mark but one that I ever remember to have given ; and he, I see, the highest of all. I shall have no cause to be ashamed of my pupils' performances, if they take as much pains with the poems they send up to Mr. Loughten, as they have done with these."

Harry took the papers, turning away his face to conceal the disappointment and chagrin with which he heard the news of another advantage gained over him by his rival ; and which, in his present state of mind, more than outweighed the satisfaction he derived from his master's kind and approving words ; and, without a word of acknowledgment or reply, left the apartment.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DISCOVERY.

HARRY cast a hasty glance round the school-room as he re-entered it, and was glad to find it empty. He hastily fixed up the two papers given him by Dr. Young, wafering them to the board nailed for that purpose over the fire-place ; and then retreated with all expedition to his favourite seat in the playground, where he planted himself so as to be screened as much as possible from his school-fellows' observation. So many thoughts suggested themselves to him, that his brain felt quite in a whirl ; and none of them were of a very pleasant character. In the first place, he was vexed because the Doctor had put Sharpe's name on the list, for he well knew that it would be regarded as a sort of triumph by his rival. He was not a little afraid that the latter would tell Dr. Young that he would rather not take any part in the match, and assign

Harry's jealousy of him as his reason. Some observations which the Doctor had made would make this particularly disagreeable to him. In the next place, he was still more vexed at Sharpe's having gained a higher mark than himself for his verses,—the very point, above all others, in which Harry had hitherto held undisputed pre-eminence. Who could say but what he would succeed in carrying off Mr. Loughten's prize from him? He did not feel very anxious to obtain this prize himself; indeed, his mind was too full of other subjects to think much about it; but he could not endure the idea of his enemy's success. He pictured to himself the face of malicious satisfaction which Sharpe would exhibit, should he prove the victor; and the thought that his school-fellows would sympathize and console with him if he should be defeated, afforded him nothing but additional mortification. Above all, the suspicions which Markland had insinuated relative to the unfair help which Sharpe received in his school-work, heightened as they were by the mysterious circumstance of the ballot, continued to occupy his mind; and he passed a full half-hour in devising schemes how to defeat and oppose the treachery he suspected to be at work.

He was startled by hearing some one moving about the roots on the other side of the tree.

"Who is there?" he exclaimed, hastily.

"It is only me," said a little voice. "Oh, brother, I am so glad I have found you! I have been looking for you all over the playground and in the school-room, but could not find you any where. Will you help me look for my marbles, please?"

"Your marbles, Walter! have you lost them?"

Walter nodded.

"How many had you? and when did you have them last? and how did you come to lose them?"

"I had four," replied Walter; "two I bought the day before yesterday at White's, and two I won of Philip Hawkins; and I was now going to play another match with him, but I could not find them any where."

"And when did you miss them?"

"Why, you know, brother, Mrs. Young sent for me yesterday, to pass the afternoon with her. I left them quite safe when I went to her, but when I went to look for them this afternoon they were all gone!"

"Well, but Walter, you should take better care of your property than that. You should put them away safe, and then you would be sure to find them safe. Why don't you keep them in your pocket?"

"Because it was so full already, Harry, that I could put no more into it," said Walter; turning

out the contents of the pocket in question, as he spoke ; which indeed bore ample witness to the truth of this assertion, consisting as they did, of a pegtop, some slate pencil, a pocket-knife with a broken blade, two or three shells considerably chipped,—as indeed was little wonder considering the company they were in,—several bits of string, an apple, a lump of toffee, a letter partially adhering to the last-named article, and a few odd half-pence. To complete the description, the pocket was liberally stained with ink, and garnished with a small hole at each corner.

“ Full enough, certainly ! ” said Harry, who could not forbear smiling at this miscellaneous collection. “ And where did you keep your marbles, then ? ”

“ I always keep them in my cap, under the lining,” said Walter, producing the aforesaid article. “ See here,” he pursued, pointing to a hole in the lining ; “ I left them here quite safe, I am sure, when I went to Mrs. Young yesterday ; but this afternoon they were all gone ! ”

“ And where did you find your cap, Walter ? ” said Harry, a little startled, for a strange suspicion had come into his mind.

“ Why, that is the strangest thing of all ! I remember quite well leaving it on the seat near the buttress, but when I went to fetch it, it was gone

from there ; and after hunting a long time, I found it in a box quite at the other end of the playground."

Mertoun's attention was now fully awakened.

" You said you had four marbles, Walter, I think ? "

" Yes," said Walter ; " four."

" Should you know them again if you saw them ? "

" Oh, any where, brother Harry ! The two I bought at White's were streaked with red in a very curious manner ; I bought them because they looked so odd ; and the other two I should know, because they had P. H., that is Philip Hawkins, scratched upon them. I should know them any where in a moment."

Harry made no farther observation, but scrambling on to the top of the root where he was sitting, he shouted to Markland, who was one of a party engaged in a game of rounders, and who, on hearing his friend call, immediately joined him.

" George," said he, " what did you do with the marbles with which the boys voted at the ballot for captain yesterday ? "

" The marbles ? Oh, they belonged to me ; I lent them to the boys to vote with."

" Ah ! but you know there were some put into the cap which you could not account for ; what did you do with them ? "

"I put them into my bag with the rest. Of course, you know, I could not tell to whom they belonged. If we could have found out that, we should soon have discovered who played that rascally trick."

"I think I have discovered, George. Have you got your bag of marbles with you?"

"Yes, certainly; that is, I have got it in my jacket-pocket. I will go and fetch it."

The bag was brought, and Harry emptied its contents into his lap; and then calling Walter, desired him to see if he could find any of his marbles among them. The result proved the correctness of Harry's conjecture. Walter immediately lighted on one, and then on the other of his red-streaked alleys; and after some search, on the two marked with the initials of his little friend. The whole occurrence was now satisfactorily explained. The four marbles left by Walter under the lining of his cap, had been shaken into the bottom of it by Markland, when he took it up to examine the votes; and with the one put in by Sharpe, had made up the number which had been supposed to exclude Harry from the captaincy. It was necessary, of course, that the discovery should be announced to the whole school; and it was agreed that Markland, as having been scrutineer at

the ballot, was the most fit person to make the communication,—a task, indeed, for which Harry felt little inclination. Walter, who was full of importance at his share in the elucidation of the mystery, eagerly ran off to discuss the matter with his own small coterie, and Harry was once more left alone.

He was greatly moved by the discovery just made. It was plain that he had suspected Sharpe unjustly ; and he now saw clearly, what he had but guessed before, that this unjust suspicion had induced him to exclude him from the list of the eleven. And Sharpe had really sustained an injury ; for though the Doctor had entered his name as the scorer, Harry knew there would not be nearly so much pleasure in that, as in being one of the actual players. The boy's sense of justice, as well as his natural generosity, told him that he ought to make atonement for this ; but it was not so clear how he was to do it. No one of the eleven, not even Tommy Brook, could be reasonably expected to give up his place to Sharpe now ; for none of them, with the exception of Warbeck, were in the least aware that Harry's suspicion of Sharpe's unfair dealing in the matter of the ballot, had been the cause of the latter's exclusion from the list. It would be difficult, as well as humiliating, to make

the secret history of the matter intelligible to them : and, even then, Brook might fairly say that he had been chosen by the boys on grounds altogether independent of Mertoun's suspicions. Besides, Sharpe had raised an additional difficulty by declaring that he would not, even if asked, make one of the players. To resign his own share in the match would, he well knew, never be allowed by his school-fellows ; and if he persisted in doing so, the match would be altogether broken up. He began to make that discovery which we all make, sooner or later in life, that it is easier to do an act of injustice than to repair it.

After much thought, he resolved to go himself to Sharpe, and try to make friends with him. If he could establish a friendly understanding between them, he might get from him his real feelings as regarded the cricket-match, and then, in event of his finding that Edward wished to play, he might privately appeal to Brook, confide to him the real state of the case, and ask him as a personal favour to himself, to surrender his place in the match. If, on the other hand, Sharpe had really no wish to be one of the eleven, there was no necessity for saying more about it. He shrank rather from encountering his rival, and especially from making any concessions to him ; but he made a determined effort

to overcome his dislike. Again mounting the root he looked carefully round the playground ; and perceiving that Edward Sharpe was not engaged in any of the games, he concluded that he should find him in the school-room : or if not there, in the library, a small apartment adjoining the dining-hall ; the use of which was, during certain hours of the day, allowed to the older boys for private study. Thither, accordingly, he proceeded to look for him, and in the latter of the above places he found him.

Sharpe was seated at a desk with a pile of books before him ; by one of which he appeared to be so entirely engrossed as to be unconscious of Harry's approach, until the latter was within a few feet of him. He then looked up and started with surprise ; and hastily thrusting the book he was studying into his desk, waited with evident embarrassment to hear what Harry wanted.

“Edward,” said our hero, in a friendly voice, “I thought you would like to know that that curious business about balloting for captain yesterday—you know what I mean—there being four more votes put in than there ought to have been—well, that business is quite explained !”

“Indeed,” replied Sharpe, “and how, I should like to know ?”

Mertoun gave a short account of the discovery he had made, to which the other listened in silence.

"Very satisfactory," he said, when he had heard all. "Extremely satisfactory, no doubt! but are you quite sure that Walter's cap was not the other one? How do you know that his cap was the one chosen to contain the unfavourable votes? It might just as well have been the other."

Mertoun could not help being nettled at this insinuation, but he repressed his vexation. "Walter wears a cap," said he, "and it was a hat that was chosen to hold the affirmative votes; besides, Walter's cap is black, and the hat that was chosen is a white one, as I think you cannot but remember."

"Of course," rejoined Sharpe, "we all know that it was quite impossible that you should have been rejected; but as the result of the ballot was set aside, and you were made captain in spite of it, and have the whole arrangement of the match, I do not see what more you can want now. By the bye, the Doctor left the list of the players here when he came in a short time ago, I suppose by mistake. I conclude, I am to thank you, am I not, for putting me down as scorer to the eleven? though I should almost have thought that my name was written in a different hand. Is it your handwriting, Mer-

toun?" he pursued, taking up the list which lay near him, and affecting to examine the writing carefully.

" You can see plainly enough that it is Dr. Young's writing," replied our hero.

" Dr. Young's! Dear me! why, so it is! but you suggested my name to him, of course; did not you?"

Mertoun bit his lip. He was growing more and more angry; but he remembered his own injustice, and his resolution to make atonement for it.

" Should you like to be one of the eleven, Edward? I wish you would tell me," he said, in as gentle a tone as he could command.

" Thank you; I am sure it is very kind of you to ask me! And suppose I should say I did like it, what then?"

" Why, then I would try and see whether it could not be arranged that you and Brook should change places; the Doctor said that any one of the twelve that we agreed on, might be made scorer."

" Thank you, Mertoun; how kind of you to think of me! Especially to think of me now, when this prize has just been announced, and the poems are to be sent in in a week! It would give me such a much better chance, would it not, if I were to be out practising all my play-hours with the

eleven, than if I were to be able to sit here all the time, writing my poem? I thank you, Mertoun; you are, indeed, considerate and unselfish!"

Mertoun with difficulty restrained a burst of passion. The charge insinuated against him was one which touched him in his tenderest point; on which he felt all the more sore, because he was conscious that he had not acted up to his own standard in what had previously passed respecting Sharpe. That any one should dare to say that he, —Harry Mertoun,— would attempt to secure a victory over an antagonist by such base and deceitful means; and worse still, that any one should have even a colourable ground for making such an assertion!

"We will say no more about it," he said, proudly. "It is clear you do not, or will not understand me; and it is useless my attempting to explain myself farther: let us change the subject."

As he spoke, he took up one of the books which lay on the desk, and which he saw was a work on Roman Antiquities. "Ha! the article on Pompeii. Well, you have resolved to begin your poem in time, any how! But that was not what you were reading when I came in just now, was it?"

It was now Sharpe's turn to exhibit emotion. "What is that to you?" he replied, roughly, though

with more awkwardness, as it seemed, than anger. "It was a book," he added, in a milder tone, after a moment's thought; "an amusing book—a book of my own; one cannot always be fagging, you understand."

The tone in which this was said was so constrained and embarrassed, that Mertoun's curiosity was excited. "I wish," said he, "as you seem to be going to work again at your prize-poem, you would lend me the book. You say it is amusing, and I really feel as if I could neither work nor play this afternoon. An amusing book would be the very thing I should like just now."

Sharpe's manner showed increasing awkwardness. "I have not done with it myself," he replied; "and, besides, I don't much like lending my books. They are apt to get dog's-eared and spoilt."

"Well, but," persisted Harry, a little maliciously, "I will take great care of it; and unless I was mistaken, it was only a green railway-book; so that if I did hurt it, I could easily replace it. It was a green railway-book, was it not?"

"Whatever it was, I shall not lend it you," rejoined Sharpe, more ungraciously than before. And then, as though he wished to break off any further conversation on the subject, he added, "By the

bye, Mertoun, I see the list of marks for this week's compositions is out. It was in the school-room as I came through just now, and I made a copy of it. I have to congratulate you, have I not, on having got such high marks for your verses on the death of Regulus?" and, as he spoke, he held up a paper on which the marks in question were inscribed; and which assigned five good marks to Mertoun for the exercises in question, and six to Sharpe himself.

Mertoun's patience was fairly exhausted. He did not trust himself to make any reply; but turned off upon his heel, and left the room. "Sulky, ill-tempered boor!" he muttered to himself, as he once more crossed the playground, and seated himself in his favourite retreat, under the shade of the elm; "it will be long enough before I try to make friends with him again, that I can tell him! I do really believe he does not care one quarter as much about being praised by the masters, or about getting the prizes, as he does about beating me, and depriving me of them: and that that is the real reason why he is always fagging at his lessons. And what is more, I don't think he would stick at any thing that would give him a better chance of doing it! I wonder whether George will find one of his letters about again! If they fall into my

hands, I will show him no mercy, I promise him ! And, by the way, how odd it was about that book. I am certain there was something underhand connected with it, by the way in which he looked ! Could it have been an English translation of Virgil, I wonder ? I sometimes have half suspected him of learning his lessons with Englishes ! Well, it is no use thinking about that ; and, besides, I have made up my mind that I won't suspect him again of anything without proof : but, of course, if proof of anything unfair should turn up, that would be a different thing. Well, any how, there is one good come of this talk I have had with him, and that is, that we are quits now : for, if I suspected him unfairly of having black-balled me by cheating, he has charged me quite as unfairly with having attempted to entice him into taking a part in the cricket-match for my own purposes. So, master Edward, I have done all I can be expected to do in trying to make it up with you : and, if I catch you trying to steal a march upon me, look out for yourself ; for I am not bound to spare you, and I won't ! ”

So reasoned Henry Mertoun ; and so have many boys, and men too, reasoned before him, and so will they continue to reason to the end of time. But it is very bad reasoning notwithstanding ! Had Harry paid due heed to the deep, earnest

Christian teaching of Dr. Young—who was himself a practical example of what he taught—he would have perceived that the trial of self-discipline, which he fancied himself to have successfully surmounted, only began where he believed it to end. Easy is it to ask pardon of those who are ready to grant it, as soon as asked : who go forth to meet our repentant love with words of kindly welcome ; and heal the wounds of mortified pride, ere yet they begin to fret and gall us ! Where is the efficacy, the pain, the self-conquest, of such a humiliation as this ? But to listen silently to the bitter reproach and the undeserved suspicion—to hear our motives misinterpreted and our prayer for forgiveness spurned ; and yet bear all patiently as the just fruit of our own wrong-doing — to persist in offering kindness though rudely rejected ; and in requiting harsh words with gentleness, in the hope of ultimately regaining the love that has been forfeited — this is the true medicine of the soul, the very bitterness of which proves our deep need of it ! Mertoun's besetting sin at this point of his life—as careful self-examination, aided by recent events, could not have failed to show him—was his jealousy of Sharpe's successful rivalry. This was a temptation, which should have called forth the most energetic resolution and unsleeping

vigilance, if it was to be successfully overcome. Not one suspicion should have entered his mind, but it should instantly have been rejected; not one hard thought of his rival should have suggested itself, but it should have been made the subject of determined resistance, and earnest prayer. To hope to subdue the evil spirit by once facing it, and after the first unsuccessful attempt resting inactive, and allowing it to take its own course, was as unwise as it would be to cast one bucket of water on a rising conflagration, and then to sit down and let it burn on unresisted.

Young reader, do you say that these thoughts are too grave for your time of life, and belong only to maturer years? Trust me, he who has a long and toilsome journey to accomplish, had better set out in the dew and freshness of the early morning, if he means to reach his resting-place before the shadows of evening fall upon him!

CHAPTER V.

THE MISSING VOLUME.

A. WEEK had passed. Dr. Young's eleven were engaged in a practising match with a rival party, got up for the purpose, consisting of the ushers, three or four of the Doctor's former pupils residing in Charlton, and some of the next best players among the boys, to make up the number. It was the second innings of *the* eleven: they were in high practice, and capital spirits. On a seat which had been made under one of the elms, or stretched on the turf near it, were Mertoun, Seymour, and one or two others of the first-class boys, watching the progress of the game.

"How steadily Charles is playing," remarked Styles; "he blocks Mr. Powell's bail-balls better than any one I ever saw."

"And so is Webb," said Mertoun. "Ah! well hit, Tommy!" he shouted, as the ball came flying

towards them ; “ three runs at the least ! If they only play as well against the Duncanites next week, we shall not be disgraced, at all events.”

“ By the way, Harry,” said Markland, “ talking of the Duncanites, I had a sight of their eleven yesterday. You know I had leave to walk part of the way to the railroad with my brother when he came to see me, and as I came back, they were practising on the green near Duncan’s house.”

“ Ay, indeed ! ” exclaimed several voices with eager interest. “ And what did you think of their play ? ”

“ Why,” replied Markland, “ I hardly knew what to think of it. The bowling and fielding were first-rate. There is one fellow who bowls very swift and straight ; and another, Holt I think they called him, who pitches his balls underhand quite slow, but all as straight as a line, and a good distance : and I saw one or two capital catches. The batting, however, seemed to me to be very inferior ; but then I do not know whether any of their eleven were in.”

“ I know something of one of the fellows there,” said West, “ a little fellow who has only been there one half-year ; he told me that Fergusson and a fellow called Townsend, were their great bats ; and Holt also was a good bat, and their best bowler.”

"Was the bowling better than ours, do you think, George?" asked Harry.

"Not better than Charles's, I think; but the swift bowler's balls seemed to me to be steadier than either Fred's bowling, or yours, Harry. But then the batting I saw was not fit, as I said before, to compare with any of our best bats; nor do I think our fellows would have missed any of the catches.—Hallo! there goes Charles's wicket! Who is to go in now?"

"I," said Brook, jumping up and seizing his bat. "But I hope Mr. Powell will not give me such balls as those, or I shall soon be back again."

Charles now joined them, and the conversation turned to other subjects.

"Have you finished your poem, Charles?" asked one of the younger boys. "They are to be sent off to-morrow, are they not?"

"Yes, they are to be delivered in before ten o'clock to-night, to Mrs. Young, and to go off by the early post to-morrow," replied Warbeck. "I have finished mine all but a few lines. I found the subject very difficult."

"Yes," said Styles, "there are so many particulars one could get very little information about. By the way, what a curious thing it is about that book, that it should have been missing the very

day the subject was given out, and no one know any thing about it."

"Nay," replied Warbeck, "we do not know that it was not missing before then; we certainly found out then that it was not in the library, but for any thing we know it might have been missing before."

"It was certainly in the library," rejoined the other, "the last time the books were looked through, and that is not more than a month ago. You may remember I helped you examine them, Charles, and I distinctly recollect seeing it there myself, and reading 'Last Days of Pompeii' quite plain on the back of it."

"No one doubts that it was there then; but it might have been taken out soon afterwards," said Charles.

"Ah, but by whom? No one can take a book out except through you, and it surely could not have escaped your memory, if any one had asked you for it,—even if the boy himself had forgotten all about it."

"Well," said Seymour, "it looks very suspicious against somebody. I wish we had asked the Doctor about it sooner. Those two days lost in making the search were most unlucky."

"We could not possibly reckon on Charles not

finding the Doctor in when he went to him," said West; "nor on the Doctor being summoned away immediately afterwards, and being away for three whole days. I never recollect such a thing happening since I have been here."

"And," added Warbeck, "you know, Fred, that Mr. Powell did ask all the boys whether they had taken it, or had it in their possession, and they all said positively they had not; so that I do not see how it can be suspicious against any one."

"Suspicious or not, there goes the Juggler's wicket, and that is the last!" exclaimed Styles, as Tommy Brook's bails were seen flying in the air. "Reckon up the runs, Harry! Seventy-eight, and ninety-six the first innings; and they got fifty-two, did they? Then they must get a hundred and twenty-three to beat us! Well, I don't think they will do that!"

The rest of the party here joined them, and a consultation took place as to the expediency of finishing the match. But it was agreed that the afternoon was too far advanced, and that the second innings of Mr. Powell's side had better be deferred till the next half-holiday. The concourse, therefore, dispersed; some to their own homes in the town, some into the school premises, leaving a small coterie behind, who continued to loiter under

the shade of the trees, still discussing the probable issue of the two great subjects of interest—the prize-poem, and the cricket-match.

“How hot it has been,” observed Seymour, “for the last few days; this long grass is quite cooling to one’s feet.”

“Yes,” said West, “it is extraordinary weather for the time of year. Do you know the milkman this morning said, that there was a rumour that several mad dogs had been killed in a village a few miles off? A farmer’s dog had gone mad, he said, at Knowlton, and bitten several dogs.”

“I think somebody has bitten that fellow, Sharpe,” observed Seymour; “no one in his senses would work during this hot weather as he has been doing for this last week; I don’t believe he has been out of the school-room since last Thursday, or had any thing but a dictionary and a gradus in his hand all the time the Doctor has been away. I hope he won’t get this prize: but his not playing in the match gives him a great advantage. I almost wish we had chosen him instead of Brook, after all. But, never mind; he shan’t get it, shall he, Walter?” he continued, turning to the little boy, who had joined them a few minutes before.

“Ah!” said Walter, pursing up his mouth in

reply to this appeal ; “ I know something about it, that you don’t ! ”

“ About what ? about the prize, or about Edward Sharpe ? ”

“ About both ! ” replied Walter, with an oracular nod of the head.

“ Indeed, Walter ; and what may that be ? ”

“ Why, I know that he does not pass all his time, as you say, in reading nothing but dictionaries and graduses ; I know he amuses himself with reading story-books ; and so,” added Walter, with the logic proper to his time of life, “ and so I think Harry will get the prize, and not he.”

“ And how do you know what Edward reads, I should like to ask ? ” rejoined Seymour, amused at the little boy’s reasoning.

“ Why, I’ll tell you, Frederick. I was playing hide-and-seek, you know, this afternoon with Philip Hawkins, and Alfred Smith, and Edward Thomas, and one or two others, and it came to my turn to hide. Well, I climbed up into the hollow elm yonder, and I had not been there five minutes, when Edward Sharpe came and sat down among the roots, just under me. I could see him through a hole in the bark ; and I saw that he was reading a story-book—a green railway-book, like the one Harry bought at the station when we came here last winter.”

"Did you see what the book was?" said Harry, looking up with sudden interest, and speaking for the first time.

"No," said Walter, "I was too far off to see the words; besides, Edward heard me moving about in the tree, and jumped up immediately to see who it was, and I asked him what he was reading, but he would not tell me."

"What did he say when you asked him?" inquired Markland.

"He was very angry, though I am sure I don't know why; and he said something about a spy. I don't know what a spy means, but I recollect that he said that, because I thought that he meant that the book he was reading was called 'the Spy.' Don't you remember, Harry, that was the name of the book you bought at the railway station?"

"Well, go on, Walter," said Seymour, who was much amused at the narrative; "what did you say to him then?"

"Why, Frederick, I thought he might have found the book lying about, and not know to whom it belonged; so I told him I thought it was Harry's book, and I offered to take it to Harry and ask him to lend it him; because I thought it would not be right for him to have Harry's book without his leave."

"Assuredly not," said Seymour, gravely, "and how did he receive your proposal?"

"Why, he was more angry, I think, than before and said the book did not belong to Harry, nor to me either, but to himself; and then he put it into his pocket, and looked as if he wanted me to go away. But I was sorry I had made him angry, and did not want to seem unkind, so I asked him whether he did not think it would be a famous match with the Duncanites, and whether he would not have liked to be one of the players. I am sure I should," said the little fellow, innocently, "and so I should have thought would every one."

There was a general laugh.

"What did he say to that?" asked several voices.

"I should not like to tell you what he said," replied Walter, colouring; "he used very bad words, and told me I was a little tiresome fool, and had better be off or he would box my ears; so I told him it was naughty to say fool, or to use wicked words, and that Harry would not let him box my ears unless I deserved it, and then I came away."

Mertoun had listened to the latter part of this conversation with profound attention. He had not forgotten the circumstance of his having seen Sharpe reading a green railway-book, when he had accosted him a few days before in the library nor the hur-

ried manner in which he had thrust it into the desk when he perceived his approach. He could not help connecting this fact with the disappearance of "the Last Days of Pompeii" from the school-library. He had himself, it should be mentioned, in the first instance, discovered the absence of the book in question. He had recollect ed on the morning after his interview with Sharpe, that Bulwer's romance was one of the books added to the catalogue about a twelvemonth before; and thinking it would be of use to him in the composition of his poem, had gone to look for it. The school-library, it may be observed, *en passant*, was a collection of books presented by various persons, old pupils and others, for the use of Dr. Young's scholars; and consisted partly of histories, partly of voyages and travels, with a few works of fiction, which might be useful to the boys in their school-work, or constitute a harmless amusement on wet days and winter evenings. Charles Warbeck acted as librarian, and was the only person, excepting of course the Doctor, who had a key. To Charles, therefore, Harry had applied, and great was the surprise of both boys when it was discovered that the book was missing. A careful search was immediately instituted, but not a trace of it could be found. After two days passed in fruitless enquiry, the librarian had gone to

Dr. Young ; but he was not in his study when sought for ; and on the day following, the head-master had been suddenly summoned away by the illness of his sister, and had not yet returned, though expected that evening. The disappearance of the book, just as it was likely to be of use to the boys in their prize-poems, was extraordinary ; and Harry, as has been already observed, could not help thinking that the book which he had seen Sharpe hide out of the way, might be the very one that was missing. True, he had just had a lesson against indulging unsupported suspicion, which had made a great impression on him ; and he had abstained, in consequence, from hinting his impression to any of his school-fellows : nay, had at first endeavoured to banish his suspicions altogether. But as day after day went on, and he found himself progressing but indifferently with his own poem, and watched Sharpe's self-satisfied look, which seemed already to anticipate success, his old feeling gradually returned upon him. He began to speculate more and more on the likelihood of Sharpe's having abstracted the book. This soon brought back the other suspicion suggested to him by Markland, that his opponent obtained unfair help in his compositions ; and his continually harping on these subjects so distractea his mind, that he had not been able to bestow any

thing like his usual attention on his own poem ; although it was a subject into which he would at other times have entered heartily and successfully. The story just told by his little brother, it will readily be believed, had greatly heightened his suspicions ; and he pondered in silent abstraction over the steps which he should take to unmash the underhand dealing which, as he was now more persuaded than ever, was in operation. At one time he thought of openly charging Sharpe with it before the boys, and challenging him to open his box and desk for a search : at another, of appealing to the head-master as soon as he returned. But the possibility of Sharpe's cunning proving too much for him made him hesitate before adopting either scheme. He was aroused from the brown study into which he had fallen, by the mention of his rival's name.

" What could have brought Sharpe out to-day, I wonder ? " observed Seymour ; " I thought he had made a vow not to quit his desk until his poem had gone in."

" Don't you know," said West, " that Mrs. Young took the opportunity of the Doctor's absence to have the school-room and library thoroughly cleaned out, and she said that none of the fellows should stay in the house while it was being done ; so that

our friend has been driven out, like an owl into the sunshine?"

"A most ill-omened bird, indeed!" remarked Seymour; "but hallo! what are they doing down in the road there? There, don't you see, by the cottages, at the corner of Knowlton-lane?"

"See! to be sure I do," replied West; "but it is nothing but a lot of boys bullying an unhappy dog, I believe. Here come more of them—boys and men too! I say, if they don't take care they will run over our friend the owl there, under his hollow tree."

He had scarcely spoken, when to their surprise, Sharpe suddenly started up and ran towards them in the wildest confusion and alarm. In an instant he was among them. "Run, run," he shouted, "for your lives, there is a mad dog coming this way!"

Not a word more was necessary. Throwing away bats, stumps, and every thing that could impede flight, the little knot of boys ran at the top of their speed towards Dr. Young's house, which fortunately was only just the other side of the road. The last of them had scarcely entered, and the gate, which fastened with a spring lock, been hastily closed—when the rabid animal, covered with dust and blood, and dropping slaver from his open jaws,

dashed furiously against the bars in pursuit. Too exhausted to struggle, and scarcely able to rise, it was speedily struck down and despatched ; and the crowd having satisfied themselves that life was extinct, flung the carcass into the neighbouring pond, and dispersed almost as suddenly as they had appeared. It was all over so rapidly, that the boys could hardly believe it had taken place !

It will easily be believed that no other topic was discussed for the next half-hour. Gathered in little groups, the boys listened eagerly to the reports which those who had been eye-witnesses of the exciting event, gave of the size and fierceness of the animal ; the narrow escape they had had of being overtaken ; and the manner in which the dog had been struck down and killed. It was nearly supper-time before any one remembered that all the bats, stumps, and bails, together with sundry jackets and waistcoats, had been left on the green, and ought to be instantly fetched in ; if, indeed, they had not already become the prey of some marauder. But the gate had been shut to and locked, when the boys had made their hurried entry ; and Sally, on being applied to, refused to open it again at so late an hour, without Mrs. Young's express permission. Being urgently entreated however, she at length relaxed so far as to allow one of

the party to issue forth, for the purpose of bringing in the whole of the missing articles. Harry Merton was selected for this office; notwithstanding the pertinacious opposition of Edward Sharpe, who wanted to be deputed instead. His urgency excited considerable surprise, for as he had not been one of the players, none of the property left on the green could have belonged to him. Harry himself set it down as a new instance of Sharpe's unceasing attempts to supersede him in every thing he undertook; and he passed through the entrance, with his aversion to the latter in no degree lessened by the circumstance. Sally locked the gate behind him, with the assurance that she should stay there until he came back, which she earnestly begged might be soon. He ran hastily across the road, and was speedily at the spot where he had been chatting with his friends, when the alarm of the mad dog put them to flight..

He cast a hasty look round him; and was relieved to see that the bats and other articles were still lying where they had been left; the long grass at the end of the green having, probably, screened them from observation. He proceeded at once to collect them into a bundle. All the jackets, bats, and stumps were soon got together: then the bails; though these were not found without some little

trouble. But the ball he could no where discover; and the length of the grass and the approaching twilight threatened to make his task very difficult. At last he remembered that Seymour and Markland had been amusing themselves with throwing it from one to the other to catch, when the alarm was given. He made the search therefore, in the direction in which they had been standing, and to his great delight succeeded in finding it about twenty or thirty yards from the seat. He was on the point of turning to leave the spot, when he saw, a few yards off, something white in the grass, having been blown there apparently by the wind. "The score, I have no doubt," exclaimed he, as he picked it up; "it is lucky I found it, or we should not have been able to finish the match on Wednesday. It is not the score though! Ha, a letter! whose, I wonder?"

He broke off with a sudden exclamation; for he became aware at that instant, that he held in his hand one of the mysterious letters, which Markland had represented Sharpe to be in the habit of receiving, and in which he suspected unfair help was given in his school-exercises. He looked carefully at the address. It was written in a bold, manly hand; the postmark was "Cambridge," and the date that of the previous day, so that it must have been received that morning. The envelope having

been torn in the opening, the enclosure was partly visible ; and a portion of a Latin sentence, in which the word Pompeii was distinctly legible, struck his eye as he turned it over.

Harry paused in great doubt and excitement. Here then was the evidence he had so long desired. He had no doubt that the letter contained a corrected copy of Sharpe's prize-poem, and was, therefore, proof positive of the dishonest assistance he was in the habit of receiving in his school-work. This would not only enable him to wrest the prize from the rival whose grasp was, as it were, already closing on it ; but would fully expose his deceit and trickery. Yet, how was he to use the evidence ? Should he be justified in opening and reading the letter ? He could not for a moment think so. Should he take it to Dr. Young ? The Doctor was not at home, and he would have no opportunity of seeing him until the next day. If in the interim Sharpe were to ask him if he had found his letter, what should he say in reply ? Should he give it up, and require him to reproduce it the next day ? or should he have a fair right to detain it, and place it in some neutral person's custody till then ? It was a most embarrassing question. He sat down to think over it more carefully. He forgot altogether the place where he was, and the

circumstances under which he had come out. So abstracted was he, that he did not perceive that the enclosure had become disengaged from the envelope, and that the latter had fallen on the ground: but continued to sit vacantly eyeing the letter, which he still held in his hand.

He was suddenly roused by a hand on his shoulder, and a well-known voice—the very voice he was thinking of—which exclaimed in his ear, “Henry Mertoun, I will trouble you for my letter!”

Our hero started into full consciousness in a moment. He replaced the letter in the cover, but did not at once comply with the demand. There was an embarrassed silence on both sides. It was hard to say which of the two boys felt the more uncomfortable.

At last Sharpe again spoke.

“ Give me my letter, Mertoun. You have no right to keep it.”

“ I do not know that,” answered Harry, sharply. “ I suspect there has been unfair dealing about this prize; and I have a right to see that I and others are not cheated. The contents of this letter ought to be shown to the Doctor!”

Sharpe started and winced as he heard Harry’s first exclamation: but at the last words, his face resumed its habitual sneer.

"Have you read my letter?" he asked, coldly.

"No," replied Mertoun. "Do you dare to say that I have?"

"I could almost swear I saw you reading it, as I came up," replied Sharpe. "And if you have not, how can you tell that Dr. Young ought to know the contents?"

Harry made no reply. He felt that Sharpe had once more baffled him. He would not be justified in detaining the letter, unless he knew that it contained proof of Edward's unfair dealing, and this he had been obliged to acknowledge he did not. There might be nothing in it to criminate him after all; in which case he would incur severe censure, if he refused to give it up. As to restoring it now, and requiring its reproduction when called for, he felt that would be worse than useless; for he was convinced that the object of his suspicions was quite capable of substituting another letter for it. He became conscious that his supposed hold over him had slipped from his grasp, though the affair of the missing book still remained, and might serve his purpose as well. This conclusion did not tend to soften his angry and jealous feelings.

"Take your letter," said he, rising and throwing it towards him. "The time will come when there will be a reckoning for all this!"

How bitterly Harry remembered these words, not many days afterwards!

He gathered up the cricket-things and returned to the house, without waiting for his companion to attend him; and disregarding the indignant remonstrances of Sally at the inordinate time she had been kept waiting—which had at last induced her to accede to Sharpe's proposal, to go out and see what had become of Mertoun—returned straight to the school-room. Here he held a consultation with his friends as to the propriety of stating the mysterious disappearance of “the Last Days of Pompeii” from the school-library, to the Doctor the first thing after breakfast on the following morning. He carefully avoided giving any hint that his suspicions rested on Sharpe; or indeed, that he entertained any suspicions at all, that any one had acted improperly in the matter. It was arranged that Charles, as librarian, should again go to the head-master and report the absence of the book. Harry felt sure that the latter would at once institute a searching enquiry, and then Maryland and he, by a judicious hint or two, might bring the whole truth to light.

But this scheme, too, was destined to be nipped in the bud. On the following morning the missing book was found, by Charles Warbeck, in its usual

place in the library. How, or by whom, it had been replaced, no one knew ! Its reappearance was as inexplicable as its previous abstraction. Warbeck was still willing to go to the Doctor, and relate the whole story ; but was dissuaded by Merton and Markland, who saw that nothing positive could be alleged that would connect Sharpe with the affair ; and they were unwilling to meddle with any part of the subject that engrossed their thoughts, until they could adduce sufficient evidence to establish their entire case. The other boys talked, and speculated, and wondered : but the wonder grew less and less as the days passed on ; and, in the excitement of the approaching cricket-match, the whole affair was soon almost forgotten.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MATCH BEGUN.

IT was the day of the cricket-match. The sun rose clear and bright as the little world of Charlton school itself could have desired; and the fleecy clouds which sailed slowly across the blue expanse, promised coolness without threatening rain. It was a lovely first of June; and the bright faces of the young cricketers, as they met in the playground after an early breakfast, already prepared to proceed to the scene of action, harmonized well with the clear sky and the smiling landscape. They were all dressed in full cricket costume, with blue ribbons in their white straw hats; and formed a group as goodly and pleasant as the eye could rest upon: while the merry shouts and frequent bursts of laughter, which welcomed even the faintest attempt at a joke, bore witness to their high spirits and anticipation of approaching pleasure. Harry Mertoun in particular, who,

captain of the eleven, wore a smart rosette in his button-hole in addition to the ribbon in his hat, was half beside himself with exuberant spirits.

Matters had gone better with him during the last week. He had recovered his place over Sharpe in the school ; and his last week's verses had obtained a higher mark than those of his rival. Moreover, a vague rumour had reached Charlton that there were two poems decidedly better than the rest ; and that the one Mr. Loughten was inclined to prefer, had a motto taken from Virgil. This report had come to the boys through George Maryland, one of whose brothers it appeared was a friend of Mr. Loughten's. Now, Harry's motto was taken from the Georgics of Virgil, and no one knew from what author that of Sharpe had been selected ; but his face had been carefully watched when the report was mentioned in his presence ; and as it had not exhibited a shade of satisfaction, or indeed any expression at all, except a stealthy glance at Harry, it was generally thought that he did not regard the intelligence as favourable to him. At all events the rumour had been enough to restore Harry's confidence ; a thing never hard to accomplish in the bright and cheerful days of boyhood. By Dr. Young's desire Mr. Loughten was to address a letter to him as head-boy (as well as one to the

Doctor himself), announcing the successful motto : for not one post was to be lost in sending to Mr. Loughten the name of the successful competitor ; and the head-master felt quite uncertain whether he might not again be summoned any day to his sister's bedside. For the last day or two, therefore, the arrival of each morning's post had caused our hero some trepidation ; but no sooner had that gone by, than he at once shook off his anxiety ; which, in truth, rarely embitters the mirth, or haunts the pillow of the school-boy. At any rate, to-day he seemed to have cast it aside altogether, and to have forgotten that such a thing had any existence.

“ What a glorious day for a match ! ” he said, swinging and poising his bat with all a cricketer’s dexterity. “ Splendid order the turf will be in ! just the right thing for your bowling, Charles, hey ? Won’t we thrash them, that’s all ? Heigho ! I wonder what the Duncanites are thinking of just now ! ”

“ Much what we are, I dare say,” responded Warbeck, with his quiet smile : “ speculating on the thrashing they mean to give us, no doubt.”

“ Treason, treason, Charles,” shouted half a dozen voices, “ to talk of the possibility of our being thrashed ! ”

“ Never mind the talking, so long as we don’t

have the reality," replied Charles; "depend on it that shan't happen, if I can help it. We can but do our best; and we shall soon see how the day will go."

"Very soon," replied Seymour, "for here comes Sally to open the gate at last! Now then, Sally, where's the key? It must be past the time, I'm sure!"

"I have not come to open the gate, Master Seymour," was the reply; "it wants nearly a quarter of an hour to the right time. Somebody said Master Brook wanted me."

"Brook? he is not here. I have not seen him all the morning. Does any one know where the Juggler is?" said Seymour, looking round him.

"I am sorry to say I do," said West, who that moment emerged from the house, "I have just left him. You will find him in the dining-room, Sally. I am sorry to say he has cut his left hand so badly with a breakfast-knife, that he will not be able to hold a bat to-day."

"What! he has been playing the juggler again, I suppose?" asked Seymour.

"Yes," said West, "foolish fellow! that he should have been silly enough to try and exhibit his knife-catching tricks on this day of all days in the year. He must needs display his dexterity for

the edification of our umpire, who is just come in ; and a pretty slash he has given himself ! ”

“ Poor Juggler,” said Seymour ; “ I always told him he would some day catch the knife by the blade instead of the handle ; and now it has come true ! Is he much disappointed, West ? ”

“ Yes, a good deal ; but I left him comforting himself that he would still be able to score, as his right hand was not hurt.”

The little conclave gathered closer together to debate what was to be done in this unforeseen emergency.

“ Another fellow must be got to play, of course,” said West ; “ and he must be chosen at once, or he will not be ready.”

“ Yes, but whom are we to have ? ” asked Styles.

“ I don’t know, I’m sure,” remarked Seymour ; “ I only know whom I hope we shall *not* have ! ”

“ You mean Sharpe, I suppose, Frederick ? ” said Markland.

“ Ay, to be sure,” replied Seymour, “ whom else ? ”

“ We have no choice,” interposed Warbeck, quietly ; “ the Doctor himself put his name down as the twelfth on the list ; and therefore it comes by right to him.”

“ But you forget, Charles,” rejoined Seymour,

" that he refused to have any thing to do with the match ; and that no one knows even to this moment whether he meant to have acted as scorer."

" He spoke in a moment of anger," said Warbeck ; " and it would not be fair to hold him to his words, even if we had any discretion in the matter, which, I think, we have not ; but Mertoun is the proper person to settle the point, as he is captain.

Harry thus appealed to, replied, though not very graciously, that of course Sharpe must be asked ; but that very likely he would decline ; in which case the Doctor must be applied to, to sanction the selection of another player.

" Decline ! " said Seymour, " trust me he won't do that. If we had wanted him to play, I grant you he would have refused ; but as it is, small chance of his saying no ! "

" Well, any how he must be asked at once," said Harry. " I suppose it is my business to speak to him ; but I would rather not go alone ; you will accompany me, Charles, will you not ? " Warbeck nodded assent. " And now, does any one know where he is ? "

" There," said Styles, pointing to a figure seated half out of sight, among the roots of Morley's elm. " I saw him go there nearly half an hour ago, the moment he had done his breakfast."

"I would wager any money," said Seymour, as Mertoun and Warbeck departed on their errand, "that he would insist upon playing, even if we all went down upon our knees to him to beg him not.—Hallo! at all events, the conference was not a very long one," he continued, as the two friends, after exchanging a few words with Sharpe, returned to their companions; while Sharpe himself rose and went towards the house.

"Well, Harry, what does he say? Does he play or not?"

"Yes," said Mertoun, drily; "he has gone to put on his cricket things."

Half an hour afterwards, the whole party had reassembled on Charlton-green. It was a gay and animated scene. At one corner of the ground, a hundred yards or so from the wickets, a marquee, with gay streamers and flags, had been erected; under which the two elevens were to dine: and the cricket-ground itself was marked off with little blue and red banderoles—the colours of the rival elevens. Dr. Duncan's boys were already on the ground, when our hero and his companions made their appearance. They were, on the whole, a stronger and taller set than their antagonists; and their uniforms of white and red set off their figures to advantage. Notwithstanding the earliness of

the hour, a large concourse of visitors—neighbours, and friends of the different players—had already assembled; and old cricketers, as they eyed the two elevens, and marked their high spirit, and the skill with which they handled their various weapons of warfare, predicted a severe struggle.

The toss was made and won by the Duncanites; who, somewhat to the surprise of their opponents, preferred taking the first innings. Harry and his party took up their places in the field, and the game began.

It soon became evident to the spectators, that while the play of both elevens was extremely good, there was more strength and endurance on the one side, and more lightness and activity on the other. In their first innings, Dr. Duncan's pupils made some great hits; especially their captain, Fergusson, and one of the players called Townsend; who between them had run up the score to more than thirty notches, before they were bowled out. The other bats had been less successful; and Charles Warbeck's steady bowling had lowered most of the last wickets, without any runs at all being obtained. Their entire score amounted to sixty-two runs. On the other side, almost all the players of Dr. Young's party added something to the general account; the only failure being Harry

Mertoun, who had struck his own wicket in his very first over. Their innings amounted to fifty-seven runs, thus leaving their antagonists five in advance of them. This result had, in some degree, damped our young friends ; who were by no means pleased at being in arrear of their antagonists. Especially were they disappointed at Mertoun's failure, he having been always regarded by them—take him all in all—as their best player : and not a few remarks were exchanged between the boys on the subject, as they paused to rest between the innings, before resuming the game.

"Why, what ever can have come to Harry ?" said West. "I never knew him hit his wicket before in my life ! If he had only got a tolerable innings, we must have been ahead of the Duncantes."

"I don't think so much of his getting no runs," observed Markland ; "I have known the best players in England lose their wickets, without getting a run : but what could possess him to bowl in that way ? At least ten of their score were run up by his wide balls ; and he did not take a single wicket. If you had not taken his place, and bowled pretty well, Fred, and if Charles had not done capitally, we should have run a fair chance of being beaten single innings !"

"He will do better in the next⁴ innings," said Warbeck. "I think something had occurred to put him out of spirits ; and if he only plays ordinarily well, we shall win yet."

"Win ! to be sure we shall," shouted Seymour. "Why, if Harry only bowls and bats half as well as he did yesterday, we are certain to win easily!"

"I don't know that, Fred," rejoined Warbeck. "I never saw two much better bats than Townsend and Fergusson are ; and Holt too played very well, though, luckily for us, he was run out. By the bye, how capitally Sharpe played !—he caught two fellows in splendid style, and got thirteen runs, did he not ?"

"Yes, that did he," observed Seymour. "I never thought to have liked him half so well. But it is lucky for our chance of the game that Tommy Brook cut his fingers this morning. I doubt whether the Juggler would have caught either of the balls as Sharpe did, notwithstanding his skill in the juggling line ; and certainly he would not have hit Holt's bowling as well. Well, every thing in nature has its use, they say, if one can but find it out, and this I suppose is Edward Sharpe's ! But see, the Duncanites are getting ready to begin the second innings. We must lay out. Where's Harry ?"

"Here he is!" said Warbeck, who was glad to see that his friend seemed to have recovered his spirits again. "They are going to begin the second innings, Harry. We want to know whether you will bowl first, or whether Fred and I shall begin."

"Why, I think you two had better begin, and I will stand point. I think I might make a catch or two. As soon as a change of bowling is wanted, I will take one of your places. Here come the Duncanites. Ha! they are putting Townsend and Fergusson in first. I see what they want,—they think one of them will probably stick in throughout the whole innings. Well, we will baffle them, if we can. Now then, umpire, call the over, and let us begin."

Mertoun had begun the match with less readiness and animation than he could have supposed possible on such an occasion. The fact is, he had been greatly out of sorts ever since it had been determined that Sharpe was to play. He had chafed under the loss of time occasioned by practising for the match;—the effect of which had been, to enable his rival to give undivided attention to his poem;—and he had tacitly, though perhaps he hardly realised the feeling, comforted himself by reflecting, that if Sharpe had had an advantage over him in that respect, at least he would, in return,

have his advantage in playing in the match from which the other was excluded. But here was Sharpe enjoying the same pleasure and privilege with himself, without having paid the price for it which he had been obliged to give. He felt, too, that Sharpe had succeeded in making one of the eleven, not through his help, but in spite of his efforts to prevent it; and that Sharpe was well aware of the fact, and viewed the matter in the light of a triumph over him,—as, indeed, his manner, when told of Brook's inability to play, had plainly enough shown. This was not a pleasant beginning; nor did matters mend as the day went on. On the contrary, his rival's success in the first innings of the match greatly increased his annoyance; for he felt that it made his attempt to exclude Sharpe from the eleven, appear still more spiteful and unjust than it really was. Dr. Young had come upon the ground just as Sharpe made the famous catch which had cut short Townsend's career, and which had elicited a burst of applause from all quarters of the field. During Edward's own innings also, at every successful hit he fancied that the Doctor's eye was turned upon him, with a look of surprise and doubt, which brought back forcibly to his recollection the interview when the list of players was first handed in, and made his cheeks burn with

shame and vexation. Nor had his temper been improved by his having heard some of the spectators expressing their surprise, that Dr. Young's eleven should have put some of their inferior players in early in the innings, and kept back one of their best to the very last, thus running the risk of his having no opportunity to make runs. Lastly, his own failure both in bowling and batting—which had been almost entirely caused by his impatience and want of temper—had put the finishing stroke to his chagrin and annoyance. He could see from the blank and surprised faces of his school-fellows, how much they were disappointed; and Warbeck's good-natured attempts to laugh off his miscarriage, irritated his pride almost as much as Sharpe's ill-concealed satisfaction.

His brother Walter had alone given him any comfort. The little fellow had nestled up close to him, as he sat alone in a corner of the marquee, at the close of the first innings, and had told him that he thought he had good news for him.

“What may that be, Walter?” said Harry, pleased with the child’s affection, and glad to divert his own uncomfortable thoughts.

“Why, brother, was not the motto of your poem taken from Virgil?”

"Yes, Walter; from the Georgics. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know any thing about George's motto," replied Walter; "but if yours was from Virgil, I think you have got the prize."

"Indeed! What makes you think that?" and Mertoun's heart bounded as he spoke.

"I will tell you, brother. I was sitting just now near the Doctor, on the scorer's seat, when a letter was brought him from the house. He looked at it, and I saw it contained a list, like the one you wrote for Charles, and George, and Frederick, a week or so ago, to send in to the Doctor. Just then, he looked up and saw me, and he smiled, and asked me if I could tell him who had a motto from Virgil. I said I was not sure, because you see, Harry, I should not have liked to have said you, if it had not been you. And then he smiled again, and asked me where you were; and I said, I dared say you were in the tent, and should I send you. But he said, no; the second innings was just going to begin, and it would be time enough when the match was over: and so I came away. But I think, Harry, you must have got the prize, or he would not have looked so pleased," added the little boy; to whom it never occurred, that the head-master might be as much

pleased at the success of one pupil, as that of another.

Harry's heart beat high. Had he really got it, after all? He had never known how much he had desired it till now; when it seemed almost within his grasp. Not that his success was by any means certain. He was aware that Dr. Young knew that his motto was taken from Virgil; for he had asked the Doctor just before the poems went in, to lend him an index to Virgil, in order to find out the book and line of the passage he had selected. He also knew, that no other boy had chosen his motto from that author; always excepting Sharpe, whose motto, as has been already observed, was known to himself only. Harry reflected that Dr. Young did not know the words of his motto, and that it was possible that Sharpe had also made his selection from Virgil. Still, the chances were in his favour, and this was enough to revive his spirits, and send him out to the second innings with alacrity and confidence.

He soon found that all his energies were needed. Twenty-five notches were scored before either of the two first players of the hostile eleven could be disposed of; when Warbeck, with a fine bail-ball, succeeded in lowering Fergusson's wicket. One or two others followed, with less success; until Holt

made his appearance in the field, facing Townsend, who still retained his bat : when the score began to grow ominously long. In vain did Seymour deliver his swiftest shooters ; in vain did Warbeck bowl ball after ball straight as a line, and pitched to precisely the right distance. The straight balls were blocked ; the others hit far and near to all parts of the field. The odds were growing heavy in favour of the Duncanites ; when our hero took Seymour's place at the wicket ; and those of the spectators who had seen his bowling in the forenoon anticipated little advantage from the change. They were, however, mistaken : the very first ball Harry delivered, sent Holt's bails flying ; and not many overs afterwards, a similar ball cut short the success of the formidable Townsend. The remaining players were disposed of by Charles and himself, without any great addition to the number of runs ; and the hopes of Dr. Young's party once more revived. The general opinion of the ground, however, was unfavourable to their success. Dr. Duncan's eleven had added no less than eighty-two runs to their total ; sixty-seven of which had been obtained before the beginning of Mertoun's bowling. Eighty-two runs, with the addition of the five, by which they had exceeded their opponents in the first innings, gave them a lead of eighty-seven : a number which it seemed

unlikely that Dr. Young's pupils—judging by the previous play—would obtain. Nevertheless, the result was quite uncertain; and when, at two o'clock, both parties went to their dinner in the marquee, it was universally agreed by the spectators, that it was one of the best and most interesting matches that had ever been witnessed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DOUBLE DECISION.

DINNER was over, and the crowd of spectators, which had increased considerably since the morning, looked on with eager interest to the final struggle which was about to commence. Reassured by his recent success, and warmed by the excitement of the contest, Harry Mertoun was himself again: skilfully directing every movement, and reassuring by his own hearty confidence, the doubtful spirits of his party. He first placed the two Sawyers at the wickets, with injunctions to them to block every ball which might be in the least degree dangerous, and to try to raise the score slowly by single runs. This Fabian policy proved successful. It was very long before either of the brothers could be got out. A single run here and there, aided by an occasional bye or wide ball, was added to the account; and when, after three-quarters of an hour, Thomas

Sawyer was bowled by Fergusson, all parties were surprised to find that eighteen notches had been obtained. Styles succeeded, and then Seymour, who made some slashing hits ; and when the latter retired the total exceeded thirty. Warbeck, in the momentary absence of Mertoun, who ought to have gone in before him, came next, and a long interval again followed, during which the score crept slowly and surely up to more than fifty. The opinion of the bystanders again began to change, and the prospects of ultimate success, for Dr. Young's side, to grow more hopeful.

At this juncture Mertoun's arm was nudged, and a letter put into his hand. "It came for you in the middle of the day, Harry," said Walter, "at the same time as Dr. Young's, but Sally did not think of sending it out to you. I saw it when we went in to dinner, and asked leave to bring it out to you. I thought you would like to see it, for I am sure it contains good news!"

Harry took the letter and hesitated a few moments as to whether he should open it at once, or defer doing so till the close of the game. He looked carefully at the postmark. This was, as he had expected, Ilton, Mr. Loughten's place of residence ; and it had besides, the initials E. L. in one corner of the envelope. It contained then, beyond

all possibility of doubt, the news of the decision of the prize ; upon which he had bestowed so many anxious thoughts, and which every day that passed had but increased his eagerness to obtain ! Should he open it ? What glorious work, he thought, it would be to go in for his innings, with the knowledge that he had gained it ! He felt as if he could then get any number of runs, or defeat any antagonists ! Ah, but then if the news should be unfavourable ; if Sharpe had after all succeeded in wresting the palm from him. He could not endure the notion ; he longed to put an end to his anxiety ; but he could not for the life of him muster up courage to break the seal of the letter.

He was roused from his reflections by a general shout, followed by a repeated mention of his name. He looked up. Richard Sawyer had been run out, and the boys were calling upon him to take his place.

“ Now, Harry,” was the general cry, “ it is your turn. We must not see you out again under twenty runs ! ”

“ Make haste, Harry,” said West, running up to him ; “ Charles is playing capitally, and has got a good sight of the ball ; as little time should be lost as possible.”

“ I cannot go in now,” replied Mertoun ; “ I

shall be ready, perhaps, when the next wicket falls ; but just at this moment—I can't tell you why—but I had rather that you took my place."

West looked surprised ; but there was no time for remonstrating ; and, accordingly, he moved to take his station at the wicket.

Mertoun having disposed of this interruption, again turned his thoughts to the letter which he still held unopened in his hand. Could he trust Walter's report as to what Dr. Young had said to him before dinner ? No doubt the Doctor had received the same news which his own letter contained : but the question was, had he ascertained by any means what his motto was, and did what he had said to Walter, imply that that motto was the successful one ? It seemed like it, certainly ; but after all it was but a conjecture.

" Well," exclaimed he at last, after another interval of debate with himself, "at all events any certainty will make me less nervous than this anxiety and suspense, so here goes," and as he spoke he broke the seal of the envelope, and opened the letter. But he had scarcely read the first few words when a second and still louder shout burst from the spectators. Charles Warbeck had been bowled out ; and Mertoun's companions were once more, and still more loudly calling upon

him to go in and save the game. They were in fact getting very anxious about the result; twenty-nine runs still remained to be got, and Markland and Mertoun were the only players upon whom they could now rely; since neither Baker nor Webb were likely to stand against the fine bowling of their adversaries; and it could hardly be hoped that Sharpe would be again so successful as he had proved in the first innings. Harry, therefore, was loudly called for; but to the great annoyance and perplexity of his friends he still refused to go in before Markland; promising, however, this time to take the first vacancy that might occur. In order to make sure of being able to do this, he at once proceeded to read his letter. It was as follows:—

“ Ilton, May 31, 184-.

“ MY DEAR YOUNG FRIEND,

“ The good Doctor tells me that he cannot be sure of being at Charlton when my letter to him arrives there; and he wishes me therefore to write to you also as dux of the school, by the same post; as you are, perhaps, aware that the Warden of Westonbury requires the name of the successful candidate to be forwarded to him immediately. If, therefore, Dr. Young should not be at home when this arrives, I shall be much obliged to you to send me the names of the boys owning the two following

mottoes. The first will receive the prize. What this is my friend, the Warden, has not hitherto allowed me to declare; but Dr. Young will now explain it to you.—The second will have a set of handsomely bound books.

“First prize.—*Virg., Aeneid. VI. 266.*

‘*Sit mihi fas audita loqui ; sit numine vestro
Pandere res altâ terrâ et caligine mersas*¹.’

“Second prize.—*Virg., Georg. I. 493.*

‘*Scilicet et tempus veniet, cum finibus istis
Agricola, incurvo terram molitus aratro,
Exesa inveniet scabrâ robigine pila,
Grandiaque effossis mirabitur ossa sepulcris*².’

“Both these poems are highly creditable compositions, and nearly equal in excellence. In respect of imagination and taste the second is even the better of the two: but the first is so decidedly superior in correctness, in classical research, and knowledge of the details of the subject of the poem, as to leave no doubt that it ought to rank first.

“If either of these two should be yours—but

¹ “Aid me, ye gods, that so may be revealed
Things 'neath the earth, by darkness long concealed !”

² “In the far future it shall chance that there,
The ploughman, as he drives the twisted share,
On rusted spears shall light, and with amaze
Survey the giant bones of ancient days !”

more particularly the first of the two,—let me offer you my sincere congratulations on your well-merited success.

“ I am,

“ Very sincerely yours,

“ ERNEST LOUGHTEN.”

The paper fell from Mertoun's hands. Beaten, beaten after all! and, doubtless, by Sharpe; for he knew the mottoes of all the other boys—and, besides, no one else could, he was fully assured, have defeated him.—Beaten, too, from want of knowledge of detail; the very thing he had been unable to procure. “ Ha!” exclaimed he, as the incident of Bulwer's “Last Days of Pompeii” again flashed upon him, “that explains it, then. Sharpe *did* get possession of that book! that is where he got his knowledge of detail from; and that is why the book was not returned till after the poems had been sent in. Superior correctness, too! No doubt! when his poem had been looked over and corrected by his brother! That explains the letter I found on the green! There cannot be doubt of it! But I vow all shall come out now. I will go to the Doctor the first thing as soon as this tiresome match is over! I will not be cheated in this shameful way by that treacherous sneak! and so be need not expect it!”

His angry soliloquy was interrupted by a third shout from the cricket-field, louder than any that had preceded it, and which announced the loss of another wicket. West, after scoring a few notches, had, in the indiscretion of his zeal, ventured out of his ground, and had been skilfully stumped out. Six wickets were now down for sixty-two runs, and there were still twenty-five to be got. The odds were decidedly adverse to the hopes of Dr. Young's boys. Unless Harry himself made a good innings, there was no one who could be safely relied upon to get runs; and many were the exhortations to play steadily which he received, and to get a full sight of the ball, before he ventured to hit at Holt's dangerous bowling. But our hero was at once greatly irritated, and thoroughly disheartened; and when he took his post at the wicket, he was in no mood to take advice or to practise caution. He hit wildly at the first ball bowled to him; and Holt, perceiving his advantage, delivered the next even more slowly than was his wont, but pitched with skilful nicety to exactly the dangerous distance. Harry fell into the snare. He stepped forward, and struck with all his force at the ball, which flew up, and was the next minute deposited in the hands of one of the adverse party. A tremendous shout burst forth, for this mishap

was regarded by all present as the crowning discomfiture of Harry's side. But three players now remained to go in, and they were the very dregs of the eleven. Mertoun himself, with an angry exclamation, shouldered his bat; and, avoiding the chilling silence, or the good-natured condolence with which he was sensible he should be greeted by his friends, walked straight to the marquee, to hide himself within its recesses. On his way he passed Edward Sharpe, whose face, he fancied, wore an expression of affected pity and suppressed triumph, which added fuel to the hatred with which he was fast learning to regard him. He entered the marquee, and stationing himself as far out of sight as possible, behind a pile of benches and clothes, abandoned himself to his bitter and indignant feelings.

Meanwhile a consultation took place between Seymour and Warbeck; who, by Harry's voluntary abdication, were compelled to assume the duties of the captain.

"We have lost the match, Charles," said Seymour, "that is certain! What could induce Harry to play in that extraordinary way?"

"Never mind him just now," replied Warbeck
"We must settle what to do."

"Well!" said Seymour; "there is nothing, I

think, to be done, except to take our defeat as coolly as we can. There are but three of our fellows to go in to get twenty-five notches ; and not one of them can be reckoned on to get three ! ”

“ I am not sure of that, Fred,” observed Warbeck ; “ recollect Sharpe got thirteen runs in his first innings. If he were to do that again, only twelve runs would remain ; and Markland and the others might get them.”

“ Yes ! but what chance do you think there is of his doing that ? Not but what I think it quite worth while to send him in at once, before Baker or Webb : for I am sure neither of them will get a score, and he perhaps may.”

This resolution was at once acted on, and Sharpe sent in to supply Mertoun’s vacancy. The game, which had been for a few minutes interrupted, was resumed. But the interest of the bystanders was a good deal diminished, and many were preparing to quit the ground, considering the defeat of Mertoun’s side as certain. The appearance of Sharpe, who had been successful in the first innings, in some degree revived their attention ; and it was soon fully restored. After carefully blocking several balls, he made a hit which obtained two runs ; soon after, two others of one each ; and then another, for which he again marked two. Markland also

played steadily, and made two or three notches. Sharpe again made a hit for one, and the total to be obtained was reduced to fourteen. Once more the issue seemed doubtful. Two or three overs followed, without advantage on either side. Then Markland made another stroke for two ; but was almost immediately afterwards run out. Harry Baker succeeded to Markland's wicket ; and, agreeably to Warbeck's instructions, made no attempt to strike ; but simply blocked the balls bowled to him. Several overs passed. Sharpe again seized the opportunity offered him by two of Fergusson's balls, which were not so straight as usual. He made two runs of the first, and struck the second right across the road beyond the green, almost up to the pond. It was the finest hit of the whole day, and no less than six were registered for it. There were now but four runs to be obtained ; that is, four to tie, and five to win. Again Sharpe made a single run : the odds were largely in favour of Dr. Young's boys ; when suddenly Harry Baker, in an unlucky moment, was seized with an irresistible desire to distinguish himself, and, forsaking the cautious policy he had hitherto pursued, struck at a ball which he ought to have blocked, and the next moment his bails flew into the air.

Four runs to win ! and the last player in ! The

THE FIRST OF JUNE.

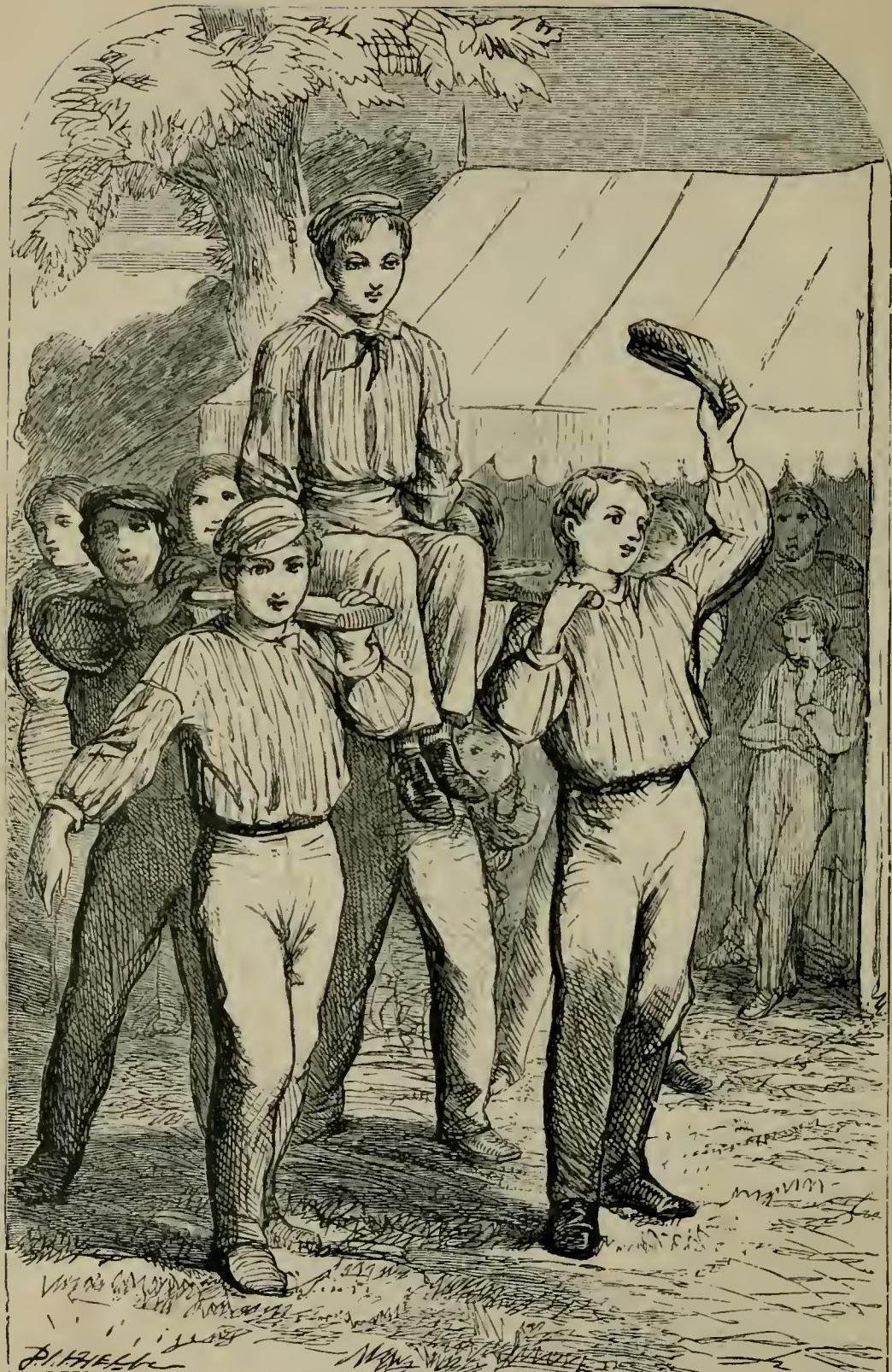
interest became overpowering as Tommy Webb appeared on the ground. Every movement of the game now elicited the loudest shouts of admiration. Every ball bowled, struck, blocked, or thrown up was vehemently applauded. Grown men grew as eager as boys; and the boys themselves were half frantic with excitement. The noise and commotion became so great, that even Mertoun, as he sate silent and intensely mortified in the corner of the marquee, could not resist the attraction of stepping out to see what was passing: and there he stood, near the door of the tent, watching the successful play of his rival.

“Well bowled, Fergusson!” cried the Duncanites; “Capitally blocked, Tommy!” responded Seymour and his friends. “Now it is Holt’s turn,” exclaimed the one party, as the over was called; “Now for it, Sharpe,” was the cry of the other. A pause—then a ball was delivered which was struck forward by Sharpe, and for which two was scored amidst a thunder of acclamations. “Glorious hit!” shouted Mr. Powell, who had hitherto preserved his magisterial decorum; but whose enthusiasm burst all bounds as he saw this important success at so critical a period of the game. Again a dead silence, as ball after ball was delivered without result. Another over was called. It was Fer-

gusson's turn to bowl. Tommy Webb stood his ground valiantly; and blocked the three first balls of the over. Fergusson grew nervous, his hand shook. "Wide ball!" suddenly cried the umpire. "Wide ball! wide ball!" was echoed by a hundred voices. "A tie! a tie!" roared Seymour; "we are even with them! One more run and the day is our own!" The interest rose to its highest pitch. Even Dr. Young bent forward with eager interest to watch the result, as Holt once more took the ball in hand. Unlike his brother bowler, he was as calm and composed as though the issue of the match had in no way depended upon his coolness and skill. Nor was Sharpe behind him in steadiness of nerve. It was curious to watch the two boys, and observe how perfectly collected they seemed in the midst of the wild storm of excitement round them. Holt delivered his first ball. It pitched straight as a die, and passed over the top of the bails, scarce half an inch above them:—a second in precisely the same place. Sharpe felt that his wicket must fall if Holt continued to bowl thus. He had not skill enough to deal successfully with such balls as these. He suddenly changed his tactics, and running forward caught the third ball on his bat before it touched the ground. It flew far away over the heads of the players, who had

closed in to prevent if possible a run being obtained: and a deafening storm of cheering announced the victory of Dr. Young's eleven!

It was some time before any thing like order or quiet was re-established. The delight of the victorious party was great in proportion to their recent depression: and shout after shout, each more boisterous than the last, proclaimed their exultation. Sharpe was overwhelmed with praises and congratulations. He had been unpopular enough yesterday, and might be unpopular again to-morrow; but to-day he was the favourite of the people, immoveably fixed in their affections. There is no hero-worship like that which subsists among school-boys. Every grudge against him was completely wiped from the tablet of their recollection: every blot, real or imagined, in his character, lost in the lustre of his recent achievement. "Well done, Edward!" "Splendidly played!" "You won us the game!" was repeated on all sides. "Never saw a finer hit than that sixer," said a veteran cricketer; "lucky you put him in when you did, gentlemen," he pursued, turning to Warbeck and Seymour, "or you would never have won that match." Even the leaders of the vanquished eleven generously joined in the applause, and said they were not ashamed to be beaten by such admirable play! Finally, enthu-



Sharpe is carried in triumph.

esiasm rose so high, that forming a rude throne composed of a stool supported by four stumps, his companions bore him in triumph round the green, and to the door of Dr. Young's house.

Where was Harry all this time ? At the door of the marquee, where we left him, watching the honours bestowed upon his rival, and as little thought of as though he had never existed ! Very bitter were his reflections. Here was Sharpe triumphant on every point at issue between them, and himself covered with disgrace and humiliation. True, he attributed his defeat in the matter of the poem to his antagonist's underhand dealing, which he was fully resolved, if possible, to expose ; and his failure in the cricket-match to chance : but he could not help acknowledging to himself—and he ground his teeth with vexation as he felt obliged to do so—that he had contributed largely himself towards bringing about both disasters. If he had not watched all Edward's movements with such restless jealousy, he would not have conceived the suspicion that the latter had black-balled him by unfair means—if he had not entertained that suspicion, he would not have omitted his name in the list of players—if he had not perpetrated that act of unfairness, Sharpe would not have had the advantage of so much additional leisure for composing his poem—without that

additional leisure, his rival would hardly have gained the victory ; for, as it was, the contest had been a very close one—and finally, if Sharpe had neither succeeded in wresting the prize from him, nor in frustrating his attempts to exclude him from the eleven, he would not have felt the chagrin and mortification, which had been the cause of his failure in the cricket-field. But such is always the case in every human competition, whether the competitors be boys or men. Our own defeat generally, our own humiliation always, is in the main our own work.

But Harry, if he could not help admitting that to some extent he had himself brought about the vexations under which he was suffering, was not disposed to dwell on that view of the case, or deduce from it the just and reasonable conclusion—that he ought to bear patiently the burden which he had laid on his own shoulders. His mind turned away as much as possible from that line of thought, to fasten with ever-increasing bitterness on Sharpe's share in the transactions of the last fortnight—his malice—his cunning—his treachery—his cold, calculating hostility ! That he should not only be eclipsed in the favour of his school-fellows and be ousted from the first place in Dr. Young's estimation, but should have to yield the post of honour

to such a fellow as that ! The very shouts of “ Bravo, Sharpe ! ” “ Edward for ever ! ” with which the cricket-ground rang again, galled and irritated him beyond endurance. He felt as if he would willingly pay any price and undergo any penalty, if he could thereby succeed in defeating, mortifying, and trampling into the dust, the object at once of his envy and detestation ! Poor Harry ! He little dreamed how terrible an advantage he was allowing the Tempter to gain over him by thus nursing his proud and jealous feelings. It was even in such a frame of mind that Saul listened to the Jewish women as they sang that “ Saul had slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands : ” and, as he inwardly burned with wounded pride and envy, the demon entered more deeply into his soul, luring him on to his final shame and ruin ! Who shall dare, be he boy or man, to imitate the sin of Saul, and yet hope to be exempted from his punishment ?

Harry watched the cricket-party as it slowly broke up ; and when the last of his companions had disappeared into Dr. Young’s premises, he too gathered together the various articles belonging to him, and silently followed them.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MOUSETRAP.

HARRY sauntered for half an hour or so in the lane adjoining Dr. Young's house, after quitting the cricket-field, before he could bring himself into a sufficiently equable frame of mind to meet his school-fellows. When he at length re-entered the school-gate, he was met by a party of two or three of the first-class boys; who, towel in hand, were sallying forth for a bathe in the neighbouring river. Mertoun was somewhat comforted by the hearty reception he met with from them, which showed at least that they were not, as he had supposed, angry or out of temper with him.

"Come along with us, Harry," said Markland, seizing his arm. "We have got leave to go to Cumbrook meadows for a bathe. It will be just the thing after the heat and exertion of the match, and there is still full an hour before supper."

"Ah, do, Harry," said Seymour. "Markland

and I are going to have the diving match we talked of last week, and the other fellows are going to bathe near us, and be umpires. You had better come and join our match. We will try either the mousetrap or the mill-pool. It is not an easy matter to get a stone up from the bottom of either of them."

Mertoun paused, half persuaded.

"Where is Charles?" said he. "I rather wanted to see him."

"Charles, oh! he can't come. He had promised to write a letter to his lame brother, giving him a long account of the match; and he says he should not have time to write this evening, if he went. But he will be sure to be busy till supper-time, so you had better come with us."

"Well, I declare, I think I will, Fred. Just wait a moment, while I run into the house and fetch a towel."

Our hero soon returned, but was not pleased to find that in the interim Sharpe had joined the party. The latter was a good swimmer, but certainly not equal, in that respect, to Harry; who excelled in all athletic exercises. Our hero, however, fancied that his rival meant to try and outdo him in this, as he had every thing in which he had hitherto held pre-eminence, and that that had been

his sole object in joining the bathing party. Nothing could be more unfounded ; for Sharpe had been one of the original proposers of the scheme, and had merely been detained for a moment behind the others, when Mertoun first met them. But Harry's mind was in that morbid state, in which every trifling incident assumes an unreal significance. He walked in ungracious silence ; and his companions,—who surmised that the incidents of the cricket-match, which would naturally have formed the staple of their conversation, would not be welcome to him—hardly knew what to say, and were almost as silent as himself.

At last Seymour spoke.

“ What was the name of the school to which you said you were going, after the holidays, Harry ? ”

“ Westonbury,” replied our hero ; and as he spoke, a dim recollection came into his mind, that he had lately heard some mention of Westonbury. So, indeed, he had ; and it was a proof of how fully his mind had been engrossed by the fact of Sharpe's triumph over him, that he had not noticed the mention of the Warden of Westonbury in Mr. Loughten's letter.

“ Westonbury,” he repeated. “ My father tried to enter me there last Christmas ; though I did not, at the time, know it. He did not tell me, because

it was doubtful whether there would be a vacancy. It is only about three weeks ago, that he heard there would be one for me."

"Westonbury!" suddenly exclaimed Sharpe. "Really, what a singular coincidence! Are you to be on the foundation, Mertoun?"

"No," replied the other, coldly. "My father could not get me a nomination for the foundation: it is a very difficult thing to obtain."

"But what is the coincidence, Edward?" observed West. "You are not going there yourself, I suppose? You told us the other day that you should not leave Dr. Young's for two years, probably."

"Ah, so I did," replied Sharpe. "But something has lately occurred, which will probably change my mother's plans."

Harry listened with increasing irritation. Was Sharpe really going to follow him to Westonbury, and solely, as it seemed, with a view to his annoyance? The only satisfaction he had had for some weeks past was, in reflecting that however Sharpe might annoy him now, in a few weeks he would be clear of him for ever. Did he mean to pursue him all his life with his malignant and vexatious rivalry? Was he never to be rid of him? He felt as if he must beg his father—desirous as he had always been of going to Westonbury—to send him some-

where else, if it should really turn out that Edward meant to go there. He listened anxiously to hear what would be said next.

"Why, Sharpe," observed Seymour, who evidently entertained, in some degree, the same suspicion as Mertoun, "your mother or you must have changed your minds very suddenly. It was only the day before yesterday that you were talking on the subject,—it was under the elm, just before supper,—you said your brother had settled with your mother, that you should stay here two years more, and then go to a private tutor. Why, Harry, it must be in compliment to you, I think, that Edward has altered his mind! He must be so fond of your society, that he can't bear to part with it!"

It was a thoughtless speech; and Seymour repented what he had said, when he saw Mertoun's colour rise, and a faint flush tinge even Sharpe's sallow cheek. Neither spoke; and the conversation came to a sudden and very unpleasant pause.

They proceeded in silence for another quarter of a mile, until they entered Cumbrook meadow,—a beautiful stretch of green turf, dotted here and there with stately elms and plane-trees, some of which dipped their boughs into the clear, sparkling river, which wound its way among them. Towards

the further end of the meadow was a small thicket of elder and osier-bushes, which fringed the edge of the stream, and afforded a convenient shelter for the swimmers. It was the boys' favourite bathing-place. The turf, in most places, sloped easily down to the water, which was no where above five feet deep, except in one particular spot, where the bank descended precipitously into the stream, in that part of very considerable depth—twelve or thirteen feet at the least. It was situated upon an abrupt turn of the river ; and from the peculiar shape of the banks, which arched inwards over it, went among the boys by the name of the “mouse-trap.” None but the first-class boys were ever allowed to bathe in this place ; and they were strictly prohibited from doing so unless three, or two at least, were in company. A little further on—two hundred yards or so—was another favourite haunt, but less frequented by the boys, because it was within sight of, almost close, indeed, to a water-mill. The miller, who supplied Dr. Young’s school with flour, was on very friendly terms with the boys : but the irreverent Seymour, who used to complain that the flour was inferior in quality, had thought fit to fasten upon him the soubriquet of “Rob, the grinder,” which, he was wont to say, aptly expressed at once his occupation and character.

As they entered the copse, Markland made another effort to relieve the general embarrassment of the party.

"What did the Doctor want you for, Edward? He sent for you, did he not, just after the match?"

"Yes," said Sharpe, "he had something to tell me."

"You don't say so, Edward," exclaimed Seymour. "What a singular coincidence, that he should send for you, and yet have something to tell you! Pray, if it is not asking too much, what might the something be?"

"It was something which concerned only me," returned Sharpe, still more shortly than before, but directing a keen look at Mertoun, which the other was at no loss to understand.

"Pleasant and polite, as usual!" observed Seymour, nettled at Sharpe's ungraciousness. "An agreeable fellow you are to talk to! Is he not, Harry?" he added, turning to our hero, who was walking silently by his side.

"He is fond of mysteries, I think," replied Mertoun, with a meaning emphasis. Sharpe bit his lip.

"Should you like to have the mystery explained, Mertoun?" he asked sarcastically. "Perhaps I might consent to tell *you*."

"By all means then say yes, Harry," cried Sey-

mour ; "and then we shall arrive at a solution of the riddle."

"I am sure I shall do nothing of the sort," answered Mertoun, testily ; "it is of no kind of importance to me what he may mean."

"You know better than that," retorted Edward ; "but you are very wise to pretend to know nothing about it. Very clever of you too, to affect ignorance about Westonbury School, was it not ? Your letter did not tell you any thing about it, did it ?"

Mertoun flushed crimson. He turned angrily upon Sharpe. "Pretend to know nothing ! Affect ignorance ! What do you mean ? Do you dare accuse me of lying and shuffling ? You, the meanest sneak that ever came into a school !"

"All very fine," replied Sharpe ; "but I care nothing for your names. I ask you, did you not get a letter from Mr. Loughten this afternoon—I know you did though, for the Doctor told me so, and he at first thought that you had got the prize—and did not that letter tell you, that I had got the prize, and that it was a nomination on the foundation of Westonbury School ?"

"No," exclaimed Mertoun, hotly ; "it did not. I half think, now you mention it, that the word Westonbury did occur in it, but I am certain there was nothing about a nomination ; and I can hardly believe

that you are serious. There, take the letter and read it yourself," he pursued, taking the letter from his pocket and flinging it towards his opponent.

"Much obliged to you," replied Sharpe, with a sneer; "but *I* do not want to read other people's letters. Mean, and sneaking, and all that, as you say I am, I am not so sneaking as to do that!"

There was a murmur of indignation from the other boys. "Do you mean to say that Harry wants to read other people's letters?" said Seymour.

"If you have got the prize, and I am heartily sorry if it is so," cried Markland, "it is very ungenerous of you to bring it up in that way"—while West and Styles, turning to Harry, urged him not to mind what Sharpe said, as no one would regard it as being of any consequence. But Mertoun had hardly heard the offensive words. He was overwhelmed by the startling news that he had been within an ace of obtaining a nomination at Westonbury; the very thing which he knew his father had long tried to obtain for him: and had, as he entertained not the slightest doubt, been unfairly deprived of it. He had taken it for granted, that the prize would be a silver medal, or a watch, or something of the kind; and he had hitherto cared for nothing, except the loss of victory. But this was a very different thing. How sadly his father and

mother would be disappointed. How should he tell them of it? He knew that it would tax his father's means to the utmost, to send him to Westonbury. Independently of his own disappointment, what a serious loss this was for them. His blood boiled in his veins as he thought of it.

"I will tell you what," he burst out at last; "I believe most fully, that this prize has been obtained by unfair dealing; and to-morrow morning we will see, before the whole school, whether cheating will be allowed to prosper. Till then, Sharpe, I think we had better say as little to each other as need be!" and turning angrily on his heel, Harry sat down on the bank, and began taking off his clothes. But Sharpe, who was equally incensed, though his colder nature did not display itself in the same manner, could not forbear pursuing his advantage further.

"Very well judged of you, to say so," he said; "so convenient to put a stop to a conversation just when one has said all one wants, and is afraid of hearing the truth in return! But don't be afraid, Mertoun, I will not say any thing more about the letter of mine you opened, if you don't like it! I say, is it not a pity you tried to keep me out of the eleven, and so gave me all that time to write my poem in? You might have got it yourself, you

know, if you had let me alone ! And how much better you played than me, did you not, when it came to the trial ! ”

The indignation of the other boys was now fully aroused. “Shame ! shame !” they all four cried at the same moment. Mertoun started again to his feet, and began hastily resuming his clothes.

“I won’t stay a moment more in your company, you cowardly sneak,” he cried ; “and I warn you to hold your tongue, and keep out of my way, if you don’t want me to thrash you as you deserve. Come, Fred, and all of you, let us go to the other bathing-place, and leave him to himself ;” and as he spoke, he resumed his clothes, and began moving off in the direction of the mill. The boys hesitated, and drew Mertoun aside.

“I am as much provoked with him as you can be, Harry,” said Seymour, “and have not the least desire for his company ; but do you think it is safe to leave him ? The mousetrap is very deep, and he is no such great swimmer.”

“Bother him,” exclaimed Harry, impatiently : “let him keep out of it then ! He need not venture into it, if he does not like it, I suppose. He need not bathe at all, if he does not like it. Nobody obliges him.”

"I don't know, Harry," observed West; "the Doctor might blame us if we left him. It is against his rules for any one to bathe alone there."

"That is Sharpe's affair; not ours," cried Harry.

The party began to move off, when Sharpe, who had hitherto remained silent, hoping that Mertoun would not succeed in persuading the others to accompany him, called after them. "George, Frederick, surely you won't leave me to bathe here alone. I have not done any thing to offend you, any how."

The boys again paused.

"I really think," whispered Markland, "we had better stop. We need not speak to him, you know, or take any notice of him; but indeed I do not feel comfortable about leaving him."

At any other time Mertoun would at once have acquiesced; but the storm of angry feeling which had been roused within him overpowered every other consideration.

"You all seem uncommonly fond of his company," said he. "Stay with him, if you like it, by all means. I have nothing to say against it; but I won't, that is positive. You must choose between him and me."

Thus urged, the party once more moved for-

ward ; but Markland still continued to remonstrate.

" Had we not better, at all events, bathe somewhere in sight of him ? He will not be one of our party, you understand ; but if we cross the rising ground between this and the mill-pool, we should not be able to see or hear him, if he should be seized with cramp, or any thing."

" Really, George," said Mertoun, whose temper was still more irritated by this persistance in what he considered his enemy's cause, and who was resolved that Sharpe should not get his way, come what might of it, " you have conceived a wonderful regard for him all of a sudden. There is not a single place between this and the mill-pool which is nearly deep enough for a dive ; and," he continued in a louder tone, turning round to the place where Sharpe was still standing, a few yards off, " you know very little of your friend there, if you think he has pluck enough to venture into the mousetrap by himself, as any of us would. Take my word for it, he will keep his precious self out of danger : I will answer for it no harm will befall him ; and if he does get into trouble, it will serve him right, for it will be no one's fault but his own." Mertoun had turned away again as he uttered the last sentence. If he had caught sight

of Sharpe's face, he might have perceived that the latter was not so inaccessible to his taunts as he supposed.

The boys attempted no further remonstrance; and they soon reached the spot on which they had bestowed the name of the mill-hole. Mertoun, Seymour, and Markland were speedily undressed, and commenced their diving-match, while the other two stood by as arbiters of the contest. A large white stone was flung into the deepest part of the pool, and each boy tried in succession to raise it to the surface. The match soon became very exciting. After many efforts, Harry succeeded in reaching the stone with his hands, and he had nearly brought it to the top, when his breath failed him, and its weight compelled him to let it go. He had just reached the shore: the other boys were laughing at his mishap; and Seymour, who was the next to make the attempt, was predicting his own better success, when suddenly Markland started.

"Hark!" said he; "did you hear that?"

The boys listened attentively.

"I heard nothing," said Styles.

"The jackdaws in the elms, yonder," said Seymour.

"A shepherd calling to his dog," said West.

Mertoun said nothing; his heart smote him.

"Hark, again," said Markland, as the wind bore a faint cry from the spot which they had left a few minutes before. Mertoun shuddered.

"It is Edward," cried West. "What is to be done?"

"Done!" cried Seymour, starting into instant activity; "not a moment is to be lost: run instantly to the miller for a rope. You are not undressed either, Styles: don't stand gaping there; run as fast as you can to the place—we will follow when we have got our shoes on. Where is Harry?"

Mertoun was already half way to the spot, running, undressed as he was, with bare feet, across the meadows, with all the speed which a guilty conscience could lend to his steps. As he surmounted the rising ground which lay between him and the bathing-place, he caught sight of a head just above the water, and an arm clinging to some tufts of grass which grew on the steep bank overhanging the dangerous hole, known to the boys as the mousetrap. The face was towards him, and, as he approached nearer, the wild look of terror and despair, which was imprinted on the features, haunted his memory for years afterwards.

"Hold on, hold on, but a minute," he cried; "I can reach your hand from the bank!"

He dashed frantically forward, regardless of the

nettles and stones which wounded his bare flesh. He reached the river-side ; but only just in time to see a look of vacancy pass over the drowning boy's face, as he sank for the last time into the deep pool beneath him.

Without a moment's pause, Mertoun plunged after him, and succeeded in catching his school-fellow round the waist, before he reached the bottom ; but his strength was exhausted by his previous exertions in the diving-match, and the rapid speed with which he had crossed the meadows—he was unable to raise him to the surface. Sharpe himself was quite insensible ; and it was, perhaps, fortunate for Mertoun that he was so, or he would infallibly have clung to him with the tenacity which a struggle for life engenders ; and, by clogging his exertions, have sealed the fate of both. As it was, Harry was compelled to quit his hold upon him, and rise to the surface again for air. He was about to dive for the second time ; when he felt a sudden faintness come over him—he made a vain effort to reach the shore—was dimly sensible of human figures near him, and voices sounding in his ear—then the whole scene vanished from his sight, and a total blank succeeded.

Nearly an hour elapsed before he was again restored to consciousness : and he then found him-

self lying on a bed in one of the rooms in the miller's house, with his friend Warbeck seated by his bed-side. He wondered at the strange aspect of all about him; and at the solemnity and gloom which sate on Charles's face. He tried to rise, but fell back helpless and exhausted. Slowly, and like a hideous vision, the incidents of the afternoon returned on his memory. He looked up, and his trembling lips tried in vain to shape into words the terrible thought that pressed like a leaden weight upon his brain. Warbeck's eye met his. There was no hope in the mournful calmness of its expression. "Has he? Is he?" gasped Harry, with a violent effort. Warbeck slightly shook his head; and Mertoun once more fell back in a swoon upon his pillow.

CHAPTER IX

THE RECKONING.

WHEN Mertoun once more came to himself, he found Warbeck leaning over him and moistening his temples with strong stimulants. He smiled kindly as he saw him open his eyes, and said in a gentle voice, "You must not grieve so, Harry. You did your best to save him!" But even Warbeck started back, as he saw the expression of horror that came over his friend's face as he heard these words. "Oh, do not talk so! Oh, he is not dead, surely! You do not mean that I have killed him! Oh, he is not dead, Charles, is he?" he said, clinging as he spoke with a convulsive grasp to his friend's arm.

"I must not deceive you, Harry," was the reply; "they have no hope of restoring animation. Seymour was just in time to save you with Styles's help, as you were going down: but poor Edward had sunk to the very lowest part of the hole, and it

was nearly half an hour before Rob and his men could get him out. West ran home for help, and the Doctor and Mr. Powell came instantly, and were at the mill almost as soon as Edward was carried in; and they tried every thing that could be thought of, but all to no purpose. The surgeon had arrived, just as I was coming up stairs to you; and he told Dr. Young, that he would make a further trial to satisfy him, but there was no pulse, and he had not the slightest hope. But I forgot! I was particularly ordered to give you this draught —it is something to quiet your nerves and make you sleep—and I was to leave you quite alone to have a long rest. Dr. Young has ordered all the boys to go home now; but we may come in the morning, and I will be sure to wake you early, and then we will have another talk; at present, we must obey orders. That is right," he said, as Harry, mechanically as it seemed, swallowed the draught presented to him. "Now, good night, Harry," and taking no notice of Mertoun's evident inclination to renew the conversation, with a kind pressure of the hand, he left the room.

As the door closed behind him, and the room was left in darkness; for the shutters had been closed by the surgeon's orders; it seemed to Harry, as though all peace and joy in life had passed away

with his friend's retreating steps ; and the darkness had gathered in upon him for ever. He could hardly yet believe in the reality of Warbeck's words : that the rival whom he had hated so bitterly was dead ; and that his death might, only too truly, be laid at his door. Who left him alone in that notoriously dangerous spot ? Who refused to listen to the remonstrances of his school-fellows, when they warned him of the risk that his victim would run ? Who almost dragged them from his neighbourhood, when, but for him, they were willing, nay, wished to remain ? Who had taunted and driven him into danger by sneers at his cowardice, without which he might not have ventured ? Above all, who had said that it would serve Sharpe right, if harm did befall him ; and that he would be answerable for the consequences ? Again and again these words returned upon him, with the dreadful meaning that after-events had stamped upon them ! It was in vain to think of sleep. No anodyne will ease a conscience laden with such a burden as his. It had been fearfully awakened from its partial slumber, like a beacon-fire suddenly rekindled after long neglect, and the false lights which had misled him, and the dark places under which he had shrouded his self-deception, vanished in a moment away. By its broad glare, he could trace distinctly

every evil step which had led him from the path of right and safety to the verge of the awful gulf into which he had fallen ! Oh, to think that his angry pride and jealousy had cut short his school-fellow's life !—cut it short in the very moment of mutual rancour and bitterness !—that he could never make reparation—never ask his forgiveness for the wrong he had done him !—never see him again till—till when ? The thought was too dreadful to be dwelt on ; yet it returned again and again, and would not be driven away ! He tried to pray, but his agonized and remorseful feelings would not shape themselves into prayers ; and his wild entreaties for mercy seemed to be flung back upon him—a leaden weight crushing him yet deeper into the dust. Then too, rose up the recollection of the things he had so earnestly coveted but a few hours ago—for the sake of which he brought this terrible judgment upon himself—a nomination at Westonbury School—a prize for a successful poem—a few runs more or less at a cricket-match ! What vanity of vanities they seemed ! He could hardly believe that he had ever cared for them at all ! Was it possible, that for trifles like these he had incurred so awful a penalty ! Hour after hour went by. Harry still continued to toss in restless agony on his bed. He would fain have risen, and sought the society of any

companions, rather than endure the torture of such solitude : but the thought of what he might encounter in some lower chamber of the house, was even more full of horror, and fixed him immovably to his pillow. Throughout his whole after-life, Henry Mertoun never forgot to thank God morning and night, for the merciful severity of that night of suffering.

It came to an end at last. The bright lines of light which ruled the edges of the shutters, and the twittering of the birds outside, assured him that it was morning. He felt that he could no longer support the wretchedness of the last few hours ! Let others reproach or punish him as they might, nothing they could say or do could compare with what he had undergone. He rose and unclosed the shutters. It was a bright summer morning. The trees in the fresh green of the early year, and the river leaping and sparkling in the morning sun, as it rushed over the weir adjoining the miller's house, were full of life and rejoicing ; but they only reminded Harry of the plane-trees that overhung the deep pool in the Cumbrook meadows, and the fatal water that flowed beneath them ! He turned away, hurriedly resumed his clothes, and crept softly down stairs.

He turned first into the kitchen, hoping to find

some of the household about; but it was empty, and the barred windows showed that as yet none of the family had left their bedrooms. Opposite the kitchen was a parlour with a sleeping-room beyond, which Harry knew was sometimes let as a lodging during the summer months. It was probable that he would find some one there; but his blood curdled at the thought, who might be the tenant of the room beyond! Two or three times he lifted his hand to raise the latch, but his fingers refused to perform their office. He turned aside into the porch, and sitting down on a bench near the open door, covered his face with his hands.

He heard a heavy footstep; "Master Mertoun," exclaimed a hearty voice, though in a carefully subdued tone, "glad to see you, sir; hope you are well again this morning!" Mertoun nodded in reply, but his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. "Have you been in?" continued the miller, nodding his head in the direction of the door. Harry shook his head with a slight shudder. "Then you do not know how Master Sharpe is this morning?" The boy looked up with an expression of doubt and wonder at this strange question, that fairly bewildered his honest questioner. "Why, surely," he said, "young master, you know how bad he has been! It was a mortal two hours, nigher three



Mertoun learns Sharpe is not drowned.

before he come to ; and the doctor gave but a queer account of him when he did. He said it would be touch and go with him for the next day or two at best. He was to be sent for directly if Master Sharpe became worse in the night ; and I am uncommon glad I have not been knocked up to fetch him. I thought 'twere the more likely, I can tell you. But Lord love us, what has come to you now ? ” continued the miller, as Mertoun suddenly starting up without a word, rushed hastily past him and disappeared into his bedroom. “ Why the young gentleman has gone clean daft-like. I judge the sousing yesterday has washed all the brains out of him ! ” And with this lucid solution of the problem, the worthy miller, after tapping at the parlour door and ascertaining that the patient had passed a satisfactory night, proceeded to busy himself with his usual morning avocations.

Our tale follows Harry into the room whither he had retreated. On his knees before his bed-side, with his head buried in the counterpane, he was pouring forth half audibly a torrent of broken prayers, mingled with sobs and tears of thankfulness. He was so amazed and bewildered at the great mercy that had been granted him, that he found it more difficult to realise it to himself, than even the shock of the last night. The overwhelm-

ing weight was lifted from his heart, yet he could scarce believe that it was gone. It was like sight restored to the blind, when by the newly-recovered light objects appear, for the while, shapeless and unreal: or, like starting from a hideous dream, when the disordered nerves still retain the impression of their recent suffering, and refuse to credit the assurance of the awakened senses. Edward alive! the possibility of redeeming the past! Of exchanging forgiveness! Of effacing old jealousy and hatred by love and kindness! How he wept, and prayed, and blessed God: apprehending for the first time that of all Divine mercies there is none so gracious as the permission to repent!

But Mertoun's imagination hurried him on too fast. Sharpe was still in a most precarious state, and so reduced in strength, that it was nearly a fortnight before he could bear even the short journey to Dr. Young's house, or see any visitor. Every day Harry went between school-hours to Cumbrook Mill, to leave a bunch of wild flowers that he had gathered, or a book of prints,—for Edward was not yet allowed to read,—or a basket of early strawberries, with a kind message of enquiry and hopes for his speedy restoration: and though the reports were generally favourable, yet the progress was very slow, and there were occasionally slight relapses

which renewed for the time Harry's alarm and disquietude. Very wholesome for him were these visits. Wholesome was the sacrifice of his play-hours which they entailed upon him. Wholesome, the equally kind messages and thanks he received in return from his former rival: for he too was softened by suffering, and startled by the near approach of death.—Most wholesome of all, the habit of fervent daily prayer for his school-fellow's recovery, which they engendered and sustained. It was a happy day when Sharpe was at last strong enough to be removed to the school-house; and it was reported that his mother and brother felt now sufficiently assured of his recovery, to leave him for awhile and return home.

It was a few days after this, that Dr. Young one morning summoned Harry to his study: the latter had renewed, the evening before, his oft-repeated petition, to be allowed to see Edward; a step which the surgeon had always positively refused to sanction.

"I have something to say to you, Harry," said he. "Edward is still too weak to see you without serious risk, and will probably continue so for many days. But I had a long conversation with him yesterday; and it is by his request that I now speak to you.

"He has told me the whole history of your rivalry, which has risen during the last few weeks to a greater height than I confess I ever suspected; though I have long seen that it was secretly influencing you both. Edward does not excuse or disguise his own share of the guilt; which, it is needless to say, is ever inseparable from such angry and bitter feelings as you have both indulged. He admits that it has been the ruling motive of his life, for the last twelve months past; and has stimulated him to work as he has done. He considers the chief blame of what has passed to be his."

"Oh! Dr. Young, he must not say that! The fault was far more mine than his. It was my pride and jealousy alone, that made me entertain unfounded suspicion. I felt that on the night after Edward was so nearly drowned. Oh! I shall never forget that night, if I live to be a hundred years old!"

"Your feeling is a right one, Harry. You *had* no solid ground for your suspicions; in fact, you were almost entirely mistaken throughout. Nevertheless, before you see Edward, and exchange with him mutual forgiveness, it is right that you should know the real facts of the case. First, as regards the suspected letters. Sharpe was in the habit of

sending his exercises to be corrected by his brother, at Cambridge; and the letter found by Markland in his jacket, did contain one of Edward's themes that had been so corrected. But—do not look so amazed, Harry—there was nothing unfair, for they were never sent to his brother until *after* they had been delivered to me. I have clearly ascertained that fact from Mr. Sharpe himself, who has thought it right to submit his brother's letters, together with his own replies, to my inspection. And, Harry, if you had not been blinded by your jealous feelings, you might have known that such must be the case. The subjects are never set till Monday night, and are delivered to me on the Thursday afternoons. As Cambridge is a day's post distant from this place, Edward could not have sent his exercises for correction, and received them back, in the manner you believed; unless he had been able to complete them in time for the early post on Tuesday, which would not allow him above an hour for their composition."

Mertoun hung his head.

"True," he said, half speaking to himself. "But I never tried to find out any thing that might prove him innocent."

There was a pause, and then the Doctor resumed.

"As for the letter you found on the green, I have seen that also. It contained nothing but a collection of mottoes, forwarded to Edward by his brother, suitable to the subject of his poem. In all this, then, was nothing unfair. Yet Sharpe acknowledges, and justly, that he was not without blame. He saw that you and Markland were puzzled and distrustful on the subject of his letters; and he amused himself with irritating still further your jealousy and suspicion.

"In the matter of the missing book, he is more to blame: yet here, also, not in the way you supposed. I took the book out myself, meaning to refer to a passage mentioned by Mr. Loughten in his letter; but something occurred immediately afterwards which made me forget it. It was laid on my library-table, and buried, I believe, under a heap of books and papers. Sharpe was in the library when I went in to look for it: and thought, it appears, that I meant to prevent the boys from using it in the composition of their poems. He had a copy, of his own, of the work; which he resolved to keep to himself: and when the enquiry was made after the library copy, he contented himself with simply saying, he had neither taken it, nor got it. Jealousy of you, and a desire to wrest the prize from your grasp, made him conceal, what in honour

and fairness he should have revealed. On my return I did not find the book in my study ; or perhaps the fact of its absence from the school-library, during the past week, would have struck me. I have made enquiries on the subject, and find that Mrs. Young—who had all the rooms thoroughly cleaned out during my absence, and who neither knew what the book was, or that any book had been missed—replaced it in the school-library on the evening of my return. Edward is fully conscious of his fault ; and it is a strong proof to me of his sincerity, that he rejoices to think the nomination, obtained by such questionable means, has been forfeited. The day of election at Westonbury has long passed ; and as Edward could not, of course, appear there, another candidate has been nominated to the vacancy he was to have had. You must not reproach yourself, Harry," continued the Doctor, as he saw the expression which came into the boy's face ; " trust me, it is the greatest mercy to him, that he has not been allowed to have it. And now, Harry, as regards the prize for your own poem ?"

Harry looked up. " Oh ! sir, you do not think I could take that, do you ? I am sure the sight of the books would never be any thing but shame and misery to me ! "

" You are right," said the Doctor, briefly. " I will see Mr. Loughten on the subject. And now, is there any thing more you would say to me? I will promise you, that you shall see Edward the very day that the medical man pronounces it safe for you to do so."

" Only one thing, sir," replied Mertoun ; " and that is,—that you do not oblige me to go in for the half-yearly examination for the prizes this time."

" I understand," said the Doctor, as briefly as before. " I will give you some other work to do instead."

Harry was about to leave the room, but he saw that the Doctor had something more to say.

" There is one other subject, about which I wish to speak to you, Harry ; and which I had forgotten till this moment. I omitted, I believe, to tell you, that Sharpe has asked his mother to send him to Westonbury School after the holidays, if he can procure admission there ; though, of course, he cannot now be on the foundation. He says, and I believe he is right, that it is not desirable he should remain here after what has taken place. I am to see the Warden of Westonbury on the subject next week ; and I hope an arrangement for admitting him may be made. Now, what I wish to say to you is this.

I believe Edward has selected Westonbury because he wishes to be near you ; in order that he may try to make up to you, by future kindness, for past enmity and ill usage. I wish to warn you as I have warned him on the subject. Do not build too much on your present excited feelings : when these cool down, there will be much to interrupt the growth of warm friendship between you. You especially will find it very difficult to feel towards him, as you do towards Charles or Seymour. Your characters are different ; and, besides, it is rarely allowed us in this world wholly to efface, however fully we may forgive, old jealousies and mutual wrongs. Do not, then, relax your efforts towards gaining each other's friendship, if you find it long before any cordial feeling subsists between you. Though it may be hard for you to be warm friends, it is not impossible. By unwearied perseverance and God's gracious help, there is no human being whom we may not teach ourselves to love ; none whose love it may not be granted to us to win. And remember this, Harry,—and let it be my parting advice to you,—if there be any one, as you pass through life, towards whom you feel an aversion which you cannot overcome,—never make your dislike a matter of boasting to yourself or others ; but rather let it humble you : for were it not for the

weakness and corruption of your own heart, there is no one whom you would not, far less whom you could not, love."

Harry bowed silently, and left the room.

The last week of the half-year passed rapidly away; the breaking-up day arrived; and the boys met as usual for the half-yearly distribution of prizes. Those of the first class were awarded to Warbeck and Seymour; and, among the younger ones, Walter Mertoun was again honourably remembered. And now hands were being shaken, and farewell greetings exchanged. Markland, Seymour, and West pressed round Mertoun, with earnest entreaties not to forget the old school, and promises to be kind to, and careful of little Walter, for his sake. Nor was our hero behind them in assurances that he would ever bear them in remembrance. Then he turned away from them, with tears in his eyes, to his oldest friend.

"Good bye, Charles," said he, wringing Warbeck's hand; "I shall not find another Warbeck at Westonbury."

"Yes, you will, and many better," was the reply; "and meanwhile, we will never lose sight of one another."

They were preparing to leave the room, when Dr. Young's voice arrested them.

“Stop, boys,” said he, “I have something to tell you. Partings are always sad things, and I knew that our parting to-day would be more sad than usual: so I have kept a little piece of good news to the last, in order to lighten it as much as possible. You may remember, Mertoun, that I told you, that the nomination at Westonbury had been forfeited: and also that I would see the Warden on the subject of Sharpe’s admission as a non-foundationer there, next half-year;—as well as Mr. Loughten respecting your prize. I called on the latter last week, and, in his company, had an interview with the Warden of Westonbury. I gave him a brief outline of what had passed, together with my opinion of you both: and laid your poems before him. He listened attentively, and promised to take the matter into his consideration. The day before yesterday, I received a letter from him, consenting to receive Edward Sharpe after the holidays. Further, he expresses his high approval of the two prize-poems; and states that he feels so much interested in the writers, that he will, at the college election next year, give a nomination to each of them; provided that their conduct, up to that time, should be found to justify him in doing so.”

Little Walter clapped his hands. “Oh, if it

depends on his good conduct," said he, "Harry will be sure to get it."

The Doctor glanced kindly at the little boy. "I hope so, Walter," he said; and, after a slight pause, "I think so too."

If the reader is interested in Walter's own history, he will find it related in the "Doctor's Birthday" and "Walter's Friend."

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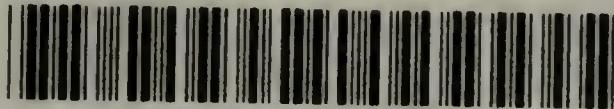
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